Bob Houck Interview
July 8, 2002
Mr. Houck's Home
Union Lake, Michigan
Transcribed by Marie O'Brien
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DC: But the first question is usually the simplest, and that's where were you born?

BH: You know, I was born in Pontiac.

DC: You were? OK.

BH: Well, actually Waterford Township. I guess if you wanted to be accurate I was born in a house in Waterford Township.

DC: In Waterford Township, OK. And were your parents from there as well? Where were they from?

BH: My Mother was born in Port Huron. My Dad was born in North Branch.

DC: In, where is that?

BH: North Branch.

DC: North Branch, I don't know where that is.

BH: Just north of Lapeer.

DC: Oh, OK. All right, and what . . .

BH: Farmer.

DC: Farmer up there.

BH: He was a farmer.

DC: How about your Mother's parents?

BH: Wow, you know I didn't really know what my grandfather did. I'm sure that—my Mother—my grandmother may have been a domestic, you know, maybe like a maid, but not exactly a maid. And I don't know for sure. You know, that's a question that's never been asked and I never asked my Mother. Wow.

DC: Interesting, OK.

BH: And my grandfather—[pause] you know, I don't know that he worked. I think he was disabled, I think. I don't know how that came about. So . . .

DC: But they lived in Port Huron.

BH: That's where she was born. Yeah, and eventually they came to Pontiac, as did my Father.

DC: OK. Do you remember—did you ever hear when he came to Pontiac?

BH: I'm going to say probably around 1932. Somewhere in that . . .

DC: And did he say why? Was there something that drew him here?

BH: Yeah, you know, they were farmers up there and I think it was the—more money in the city. [phone rings]

DC: They were farmers and—well it would've been in the Depression, so farming would've been difficult.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm—I don't know if other members of the family had come down before my Father had or not. He eventually ended up working in a factory. And that factory's no longer here.

DC: Which one was that?

BH: It was called American Forge and Socket.

DC: American Forge and Socket, OK.

BH: That was in Pontiac.

DC: Did he have a job before he came down or did he have to look for one when he got here—do you know?

BH: I would imagine he came down here and got, and found the job. Eventually, I know a couple of his younger brothers ended up working here, and I think my Mother worked there also. And so did my grandfather, his Dad. So, yeah, I think they ended up, for some reason, selling the farm, or got what they could out of it, or something. It was—they weren't making money at it, so they came down here.

DC: Is that where your parents met?

BH: Yeah, I think so. I think that's where they met, is in the workplace.

DC: When were you born?

BH: I was born in 1938.

DC: OK. So it sounds like eventually most of the families moved on down to Pontiac.

BH: Yeah, most of his family did. He had a sister that died when he was—I think he was pretty young. And his Mother died when he was about sixteen, I think. So he stayed on the farm a little bit longer then. And he was born in 1911. So he was probably, eh, twenties, twenty-two, somewhere around there when he came down here. My Mother's side, mostly girls in that family. And I think she was the only one that worked in the factory. And she didn't work there too long, I don't think. I think she only worked there probably a few years, and then she quit.

DC: What did she do then?

BH: I would imagine they got married. And for the most part she stayed in the home. A few—as we got older, there was a few times that she worked outside the home and I think she was, like, a waitress at a restaurant. A friend of the family owned a restaurant and she ended up working there.

DC: Did you have siblings?

BH: Yes. I'm the oldest of four—of four. Myself, and a sister, a brother, and a sister.

DC: OK. So what was it like growing up—you said it was Waterford Township?

BH: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK, what was it like growing up there?

BH: It was, as I recall, a lot of fun. You know, not far from school, not far from the church.

DC: What church did you go to?

BH: St. Benedict's, a Catholic church there, and it was—I think it was founded in 1948, I think, or established, I guess. Prior to that, we went to one in—one of two in Pontiac, either St. Michael's or St. Vincent's. And I went to grade school in Waterford and eventually I went over to St. Frederick and graduated from there in '56. But growing up we had a lot of fun. We did kid things, you know, imagined and did all that kind of neat stuff. Went to the movies once a week, you know.

DC: What about—did you go to the parish schools, then, all the way through?

BH: It wasn't a parish, it was a parochial school, but it was in Pontiac, so I had to take a city bus every day.

DC: OK. I was wondering if you went to school with neighborhood kids or . . .

BH: You know, there was really no neighborhood kids that went to that particular school. Some of the neighborhood kids went over to the other school, which was St. Michael's. And they were across town, and we were always cross-town rivals. But they lived on one street and I lived on the other street. So there wasn't too many that went to parochial schools. Parochial schools, back then, I think cost us $35.00 a year. And that wasn't easy to come by, necessarily, so—for the most part, there wasn't too many that went there from our neighborhood.

DC: OK. So it sounds like the kids went off in their different directions. Were there any kids going to public schools at all in your neighborhood as well?

BH: Yeah. Yeah. Yup, everybody else was going to public schools. And most of those kids I went to grade school with, through the sixth grade. And then they went on to township or the other schools and I went into Pontiac to the parochial school.

DC: OK. Had your parents graduated from high school?

BH: Neither one.

DC: Neither one, all right.

BH: Neither one had, right.

DC: And, although it wouldn't have been—you would've been very, very young, but maybe you've heard stories—what did your parents do during the war, during World War II? You would've been very young.

BH: My Dad continued to work at his job. Was also a member of the National Guard. Some of the things I remember is—and I know I was still pretty young yet—but I remember in the war effort, going to junk yards or things like that. And we used to call it pulling rubber. Do you know, grabbing rubber and—and then you could take it down to the recycle center, wherever it was that was the government effort because they wanted that type of thing. Maybe old steel, things like that.

DC: So you remember that even as a very young kid?

BH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, and I remember where the dump was at. It's no longer there, but I remember that, doing that. I remember him having to report to the Armory in Pontiac and they used to march in there, you know—it was being a part of the National Guard, just in case, you know. He never had to serve overseas but his three younger brothers all did, and I remember them all being in the service. I don't remember where his—the next one in line, I had—there was three uncles that were younger than my Dad, and all three of them were pretty close to our family. They weren't married at the time and I remember they used to play golf together and used to spend a lot of time at our house. So I, you know, I

knew them fairly well. One was in the Marines and two were in the Army, I believe. And I think one—one was in the Pacific and—the Marine was in the Pacific, did a lot of fighting around, I think, Iwo Jima and some of that stuff. The other one, I remember, was—for a time—was stationed in Australia. But he had been up in some of the—probably the Philippines. And I think the other uncle was in the Philippines, also. And I think he had a bout of malaria when he was in there, so. But all of them are now deceased. Yeah. And my Dad was the last one of the family to go. And he was probably about the one, two, three—fourth, fourth oldest, I think, in the family. So. And he just—he passed away about four years ago.

DC: Oh really? Not long ago at all. My goodness.

BH: Yeah. So, I think he was eighty-six when he passed away. So maybe five years ago.

DC: So how long did he stay on at American Forge and Socket?

BH: American Forge and Socket. They eventually shut down and left and went to Illinois. Trying to remember the—I can't remember right offhand what city that was. A little bit northwest of Chicago, I believe it was. So he had—and he had, I think, probably about twenty-eight years of service, or right around. He was almost fifty years old, I think, and he probably hired in there when he was about twenty-two.

DC: So it sounds like around 1960 or so.

BH: Yeah, it was right around there when they shut down. And he had—he had suffered an accident at work, but it wasn't a work-related accident. He was over there—they had, I guess a big—a big, not a forge but they burned a lot of coal over there. And then they used to just dump those old cinders, you know, out from that. Well, he was building a driveway, and so he says, "I'm going to go over there and get cinders." They let him do that. He just ended up breaking an ankle over there. And he broke it in three different places and it took forever for it to heal and they finally bolted it together. And when he—when they shut down he was offered a job over in Illinois because of the work, I guess, his work ethic and he learned to operate the one machine that they had pretty well. So they offered him a job over there but he didn't feel like moving at that point in time. He went over there for a couple weeks and they paid him, you know, and he kind of like set everything up and then came back here. He worked a short period of time, because I think he was about fifty years old, you know, and at that point not a lot of people want to hire you. And he worked for a construction company, but not long. He went over to Truck and Bus in Pontiac and he got hired in there at the recommendation of his doctor—the doctor who took care of his ankle also gave him a recommendation. So they ended up hiring him. And he worked there, I think, for thirteen years. And then he started having vertebrae and his back begin to, begin to collapse, and eventually he went out on disability. And then, of course, you know, once he became eligible for Social Security, then he did that.

DC: What kind of positions did he have both at American Forge and Socket and then at Truck and Bus?

BH: You know, position-wise, I don't think he ever was a salaried employee. I know he wasn't at Truck and Bus. He was a welder, I think, at Truck and Bus but I don't think it was a skilled trades job. It was something like on an off-line job or something like that where they did some sort of welding. At American Forge, you know, I know they were represented but I really don't—I don't know, you know, classification-wise, if they were into that back then or not. I really don't know.

DC: Did he ever talk to you about his job?

BH: Not really, you know, it's just—you know, never did. I knew a lot of the guys that worked there because they were all golfers and my Dad played golf and I got to caddy for him, you know, and that type. And so, you know, I knew a lot of them. But as far as talking about the job, he—I remember one machine in particular, it may have been the one that he worked. It was called a seat-back machine. And it made seat backs, I guess, for the auto industry. You know, the wire frame backs or something like that. And that's about the only thing I remember.

DC: Is that the machine that he was good at so they wanted to take him off to Illinois?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. They went to, is it Rock, Rockville? Or Rockford? Rockford, Illinois, yes. Yes, that's where they went.

DC: OK. Let's see. Was American Forge and Socket a union shop?

BH: Yeah, I believe it was. Yeah, it was. Yeah, I know it was. Because when they shut down, I know my Dad wasn't old enough to get any of the, I guess, the pension benefits—you had to be fifty or older. And he just—forty-nine or something like that. Yeah, and he just didn't make it. I know at the time it didn't sit real well, you know, but I don't think that—that didn't deter him, I think, from being a union supporter. You know, he didn't go out of his way to do that, do much of it. But I know a little later on in life when you get sent things from the Region, you know, those CAP tickets or something, he'd always send twenty bucks. And that was later on in life he did that. So, I mean, even though he was unhappy at the time, as were a lot of people because they didn't get anything out of it. And I remember him talking, you know, and some of the guys, "Yeah, you know, we're not getting anything. That union sold us down the river," and all that kind of stuff. Which, you know, I've heard the story so. But he ended up, like I say, from there going over to Truck and Bus. He may have tried being a supervisor at one time at American Forge and Socket, not liking it, and coming back.

DC: Do you have some vague memories of that?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, very vague.

DC: It sounds like he didn't talk a lot about work.

BH: Not really, you know—work was an important part. I remember we used to have Christmas parties every year, you know, down at Pontiac Central and, you know, Santa Claus was down there and we'd get a bag of candy, which we thought was great, you know, and so.

DC: That was organized by the work?

BH: Yeah. You know, and at that time, that may have been a joint effort in that plant, you know—I'm not—I can't say it was just the union that—it was the UAW. I don't know that it was just them. It may have been an effort by everybody that worked there, you know. It's just, you know, one of those things.

DC: Hard to remember, yeah.

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: It sounds like during this period, you said your Mother was primarily at home but occasionally she would waitress?

BH: Yeah. And not—that was probably a little bit later in my life, you know, I—she didn't do it much—for a few years, I think, that's all. And I think it was like an afternoon job more than anything. I think my Dad was home and she would go out to the restaurant, which was close to the union hall back then, yeah. It wasn't too far away. It was on Walton. Walton and Joslyn, as a matter of fact, is where it was at. And so, you know, just a few hours in the evening.

DC: So that would've been when he was working at Truck and Bus?

BH: Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure it was.

DC: Because that's the old Union Hall for 653, isn't it?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. You know, it could've been even while he was at American Forge and Socket. It *could've* been. Yeah, I'll bet, oh yeah I'll bet it was, now that I think of it. Yeah, because I think it was probably when I was in high school. Yeah.

DC: Sounds like your Dad worked days then?

BH: Yeah, he did. And he probably had to be there at, I don't know, say 7:00. So.

DC: Did you have any jobs when you were younger?

BH: Sure. Yeah, I worked.

DC: Yeah. What were they?

BH: I started out caddying at a pretty young age, you know. I was probably about twelve when I started caddying. And I caddied at Orchard Lake Country Club for a few years. And in the tenth grade in high school, I ended up working at St. Benedict's church. I was a janitor there. I worked after school there. And I did that in the tenth grade—tenth, eleventh, and twelfth. And I think in the twelfth grade I ended up—there was a store that was just a couple blocks from the house—I'd go from St.. Benedict's to do all the cleaning there that I had to do. There was three of us that worked there, a full time janitor and this other guy that was in high school. And I'd go from there, and I'd go down to the store, work a couple hours there at the store. Then I'd go off to Pine Lake Country Club and bus dishes.

DC: Wow.

BH: Yeah. So I had about three jobs. None of them paid much. I think—I know I made seventy-five cents at the church. You know, I could make maybe between twenty and twenty-three dollars a week, you know, at that time. And that's what I did, those kind of jobs, you know. Couldn't get anything really—it was full-time but it was part-time, you know? So. And it took every night after school, a couple hours after school and all day Saturday. We worked, usually seven to eight hours on Saturday. And I just, you know, did all the cleaning. Those were my primary jobs that I had in high school. I eventually went into the service—went into the Navy. And after I got out of the Navy is when I ended up down at Willow Run.

DC: OK. We're going to sneak up on that in just a second. I want to ask you a couple more questions about growing up.

BH: Sure.

DC: Because I've talked to a number of people who were parents in the '50s, in the '40s and '50s, and so it's interesting to hear from the perspective of someone who was a child of an auto worker at that point in time. I wondered what kinds of activities your family engaged in, whether they be vacations or, you know, day-to-day activities, or. . .

BH: We didn't do many vacations. I just recall for the most part—probably didn't have the money or the time. I was born in a—I think it was a four-room house. And I'm going to say probably about twenty foot wide by twenty-four foot long. Eventually that house became fifty-four feet long. And so, it didn't have a basement and now it has a full basement. So a lot of my Dad's time was spent, you know, building on to the house as the family grew, and so did the house.

DC: So he did a lot of that work.

BH: Oh, he did all of it. Yeah, he didn't do—he didn't have anybody do any of it.

DC: Did you help him?

BH: Yeah, but you know, I was young, you know, so to a small degree. As I became older,

yeah, you know, then I did more. Depending on what he did, you know. But I can remember, you know, holding on drywall late at night, you know, up like that. And I wasn't too old. But I was tall so, you know, I got to hold it. And it was heavy, you know—I remember that being hard work. The basement, he dug that by hand.

DC: Really?

BH: Yeah, just got down there and started digging and then we dumped it all in our front yard. Our front yard became probably that much *higher*, but that's what you did with it.

DC: Wow, so you would've worked and stayed in the house then.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yup. And my folks stayed there. My mother, she died about 1989, a few years before my Dad. My Dad was still in that house—even though he didn't die in the house, he was at a hospital where he died, but he was still living there, and pretty much by himself. Yeah. Yeah. He had emphysema really bad. He was a big smoker and so.

DC: But still, to be on his own in his mid-eighties, that's impressive.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. But he—vacations, I remember taking a few, but they were, they were like far and few between. We did a lot of, a lot of [short pause] socializing with the cousins, aunts, and uncles. My Mother—especially on my Mother's side. My Dad's side, not too much, but my Mother's side, we did a lot. I can remember going to a lot of the aunts'—and I think she wanted to do that to stay in touch. Some of them didn't live very close. I mean they—back then, you know, Auburn Heights was a long way away. And one of them lived out there, and one lived, oh, in Auburn Hills, you know, which was close—in fact it was a—had another one near the Union Hall, 653. Yeah. So, I mean, we visited around, you know? And I remember doing a lot of that. A lot of visiting. Socializing. Yeah, but as far as vacations, not too many.

DC: You went to a parochial school. How important was the church in your family life?

BH: Very important. Yeah, both my folks were Catholics and they saw to it that we went to church and I even went into the seminary for a little over a year. I had a sister that was in the convent for six years, I think. And yeah, real, real Christian Catholic family. Still go to church. Yeah, so, yeah, church plays an important part.

DC: Do these churches have any sort of, you know, ethnic base or anything? I mean, some Catholic churches are more Polish. I've talked to some people who went to those churches . . .

BH: No, no. No.

DC: No, OK.

BH: Neither one, I don't think either St. Michael's or St. Vincent in Pontiac were ethnic-based.

Nor was Saint Benedict's. I think probably right now today St. Vincent is becoming probably Latino, you know. Probably, yeah probably—I'm going to say they're probably more ethnic-based now than what they ever were.

DC: It didn't start out that way?

BH: No, no. It wasn't, it was—Pontiac was kind of a conglomeration, I think, of a lot of different ethnic background people. My Mother, for the most, I think hers was—she was like Scottish and French; and my Dad was German, you know, and so, yeah it just was, just big groups. And as I went through high school, you know, geez we had kids from Polish backgrounds and mostly European, you know. Not many black families, but a few.

DC: In the church?

BH: Yeah—and, well in school.

DC: In school, OK.

BH: Yeah. And probably in Waterford, I never recall a black family in Waterford. In fact, an interesting story is when I was still going to Donaldson schools, where I went to grade school, we had a Mexican family that moved on our street. And when we went to—where we went to school, M-59 separated our neighborhood from the school and they had a tunnel under the road at that time. And I can remember, especially though, the mothers in the neighborhood were really worried because this Mexican family had moved in to Waterford Township, and in particular into Huron Gardens and on our street. And some of the mothers were up at the tunnel because they knew if we were going to get knifed by the Mexicans, you know, it was going to be in that tunnel. And I think, what was it, there was two boys and three girls, I think, in that family, you know. Us kids, you know, we didn't—we were never fearful or anything like that. But, you know, and it blew over. And it ended up everybody—and their name was Trevino—and everybody liked them. In fact, one of them died, I think, just this past year. And he was a supervisor over at SPO Pontiac [Service and Parts Operations] for a long time. Yeah, so—but it was a interesting story if you look at backgrounds and everything, because there was—we were all white people there.

DC: How old were you when the Mexican family moved in?

BH: You know, I'm going to say I must've been in about the fifth grade. Fourth or fifth grade. And another interesting story—one of my good friends at St. Frederick's was a black guy by the name of David Jones. And I remember the first time he came over to my house. And I remember him walking, and I could see him from my house. He had to take the bus—come and stopped at the corner. And I can remember him walking down the street and what a strange feeling I had. You know, I thought, "My God, this is probably going to be the first *black* guy that's ever been in this neighborhood!" And I imagined people looking out their windows, you know, to see, "Where's he going?" you know, and, "Who's he?" and all that, so.

DC: And how old were you then?

BH: Oh, I want to say probably around the eighth grade. Yeah, I was, I don't know, twelve years old. Somewhere in that neighborhood. Yeah. It was interesting.

DC: OK. Yeah. So how did it work out? Did the neighbors ever say anything?

BH: No, no. Nothing ever. No, no. Yeah and I mean, we stayed friends. We graduated together. I lost track of him, though I do know where he's at now. We had a big class reunion in Las Vegas last year.

DC: Oh wow.

BH: Yeah. Not our fiftieth, even, but one of the guys who has been, that graduated with us, has been kind of like trying to get everybody in our—small class. We had fifty-four graduates, I think, so. And Davy's down—he's in Florida. So yeah. Those were ethnic stories.

DC: You were aware that it would cause a stir.

BH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, yeah I was aware of that. Sure. Sure. Yeah. Because in Pontiac back then at that time, there was the colored section of town, you know, and that's where colored people stayed, you know. It was—it was probably just as racist here as it supposedly was in the south. And you didn't really cross that line, you know.

DC: Did your parents, your family, ever talk about race?

BH: You know, not really too much. American Forge and Socket was in colored town. You know, that's where the plant was at. And I can remember going over to, ah, eat lunch or something or meet my Dad after work or something like that, and we went to a place called Jenny's. Jenny's was a little beer garden, you know, close, and Jenny was a black lady. And it was workers in there. And they could be black, they could be white, you know. Probably. . .

DC: Did any black—oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

BH: I was going to say probably the only form that I ever really knew that I saw any discrimination was from my Mother. And she had worked, probably because she didn't graduate from high school, and I'm going to say this was probably in her teen years, where she worked for a Jewish family and she was kind of like their maid. Did cleaning and was a domestic. She didn't care for Jewish people too much because she thought that they—I would imagine they had a lot of money and they never gave her any. So, you know, and that carried over. And that's the only time I ever heard of her being discriminatory against anybody. Yeah.

DC: Was it just words, just things she said?

BH: Just words, yeah. Well, you know, "Ah, those Jewish people," you know. But I don't remember anything specific. I just remember—and my Dad, my Dad wasn't—he wasn't, I don't think, a biased person. Or if he—oh, I'm sure he's biased, but I don't think he ever discriminated against anybody. I really don't. I don't think that was with him. And he wasn't a wuss or anything like that. He was—he was kind of a macho guy and was till he died. You know, so, he was just a good guy. And not to say that my Mother wasn't.

DC: Oh sure, I understand, yeah. You're just being very forthright about what you remember. Was the American Forge and Socket workforce interracial?

BH: I think it was. But I'm going to say probably mostly white. Yeah. But I'm sure it was interracial. Though if you ask me did I know any black people that—really I didn't. I couldn't recall a soul. But I just got to imagine that it was.

DC: Just the black people who were at your school, it sounds like.

BH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Those were the only black people I knew.

DC: Yeah. A question just went in and out of my mind. [laughs] Did you ever, you know, go hunting or fishing or anything like that with your family?

BH: Sure. Yep. I used to do—my Dad, prior to breaking his ankle, used to be quite an athlete, you know. He played baseball and oh, I'm trying to think what else. And golf, of course. And he was a big hunter. In fact, he was—he started hunting, of course, when he was a kid on the farm. And we used to go up there rabbit and pheasant hunting, him and I. But after he broke his ankle, that—and he was a big-time bowler. You know, he did a lot of that. But after he broke his ankle, then he became a fisherman. And he didn't hunt anymore, he just—he didn't bowl, and he didn't play golf. You know, those three—and of course baseball had kind of gone out of his life prior to, prior to that. But he had to wear a leg brace and, I mean, he limped. So fishing was an outlet, that he could still get out and enjoy the outside, outdoors. I didn't fish too much with him—a little bit, but not too much. You know, because that happened around, I'm going to say 19—it happened when I was in the tenth grade, 1954, I think. '53, '54, right around in that era. And I was in high school, I remember that. And by that time, you know, I was thinking more about getting in a car, you know, and going somewhere than I was thinking about going fishing with my Dad, you know.

DC: Did you play sports back in high school?

BH: Yeah, a little bit. I played a little bit of football and—in school—and basketball. I don't know if I was very good at either one of them. I always thought I was. And because I caddied, you know, I got to play golf, you know, so I played golf for quite awhile and then it kind of went, you know, by the—as I got married and had a family and things, I just didn't have time or money to play golf, so. And there hasn't been until the last, probably the last fifteen years that I've really gotten back into golf. And now that I've retired, you

know, I play five days a week now, so.

DC: That's good.

BH: Yeah.

DC: When you were younger and caddying, did you get a break on the fees to play at the course?

BH: No, it was a private course. I couldn't play there. I only caddied.

DC: Oh, you just caddied there.

BH: Yeah. Monday morning.

DC: Where did you play?

BH: Orchard Lake.

DC: OK.

BH: Yup. I will tell you this—we did—we probably did something that we had the—as far as I know, the first guaranteed annual, guaranteed daily wage, I guess is what. There was—from our neighborhood, there was probably about five or six of us that were caddies. One guy had an old Model-A Ford, and he was older than us. He was sixteen, of course. He could drive. And all of us caddies used to ride out in that. And so what we did is sometimes we wouldn't get loops, you know, and so we made a deal that we would bring the caddies out. We would continue to do that. But they had to pay us—they had to guarantee us two dollars a day. And they did. They guaranteed this other guy and myself two dollars a day.

DC: So if you showed up and didn't get a . . .

BH: Right, if we brought the caddies out there, then we were guaranteed two dollars a day. Now, if we got a loop or something like that, you know, and I think we'd probably get maybe four dollars for, somewhere in there, $3.50, something like that, in that neighborhood for—caddied for eighteen holes. Then they didn't pay us. But we never, we never went home empty-handed after that. We leveraged them and they loved it, so we made out. [laughs]

DC: That's good.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

DC: All right, well then when you graduated high school, I think I heard you say you went into the Navy, is that right?

BH: Yeah.

DC: OK. Did you make that decision before you graduated? Or how did you end up in the Navy?

BH: No. No. My friend and I that worked together, we just said, "Hey, what are we going to do?" "I don't know. Can't stay at this job for seventy-five cents an hour," you know.

DC: Is this the friend who helped you do the janitorial work?

BH: Yes, yes. Yep, him and I. And so one day we just—here's the—strange enough, my Mother and Dad were on vacation and we said, "Oh, what the heck? Let's join the Navy. "OK." So we went down and we enlisted. And then of course, when my parents came home, I said, "Hey, while you were on vacation," you know, "without me, I joined the Navy." So.

DC: And what did they say?

BH: Oh, they weren't necessarily unhappy. I think my Mother didn't like it. My Dad—my Dad was the kind of guy who let me do a lot of, a lot of my own decisions. But I paid for it, too, you know, if I did something wrong, you know. I was responsible, too. So I mean, he was a very, a very hands-*off* as far as control, trying to control my life. And I think I grew because of it, you know. That was—we—him and I upped and joined up and we went off—I think it was 1957. '57. Yeah.

DC: OK. And how long after graduation was that? How much time had passed?

BH: I'm going to say a little over a year. I think we went in—it was either September or October of '57.

DC: OK. So had you stayed with the janitorial job and all those other part-time jobs?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I'd also, I'd gone on to a trade school. I went to Radio Electronic Television School in Flint.

DC: Oh, tell me about that.

BH: And I had—once a week. Once a week I drove up there and paid my—I don't even remember what it cost back then, but whatever I made at the church just about took it all, you know, to go to that school. And I did that for a year. And . . .

DC: What got you interested in that?

BH: You know, I really don't know. I don't know.

DC: Did your family have a television?

BH: Yeah, by then they did. Oh yeah. Well, in fact, we were the second one on the street to have a TV. So we—and I think we got ours in '49 or '50, around in that era. And I don't know, I guess I had dreams of, you know, being rich some day and things like that, and I thought that was one way of doing it—get into electronics, you know. So I went up there once a week and learned how to repair radios and TVs. Did I ever put it to use? No. Other than, you know, back when we had tubes in TV sets, you know, I knew pretty much what to look for, you know, and so—and that lasted a year. So I completed that, graduated from that, you know, from whatever. And the whole deal was was—OK, now I could say that I was, you know, a repairman. And if I had the money to open up a business, well then I could go into business and fix peoples' TV sets.

DC: Right, right. OK.

BH: Never happened. Never happened.

DC: Did you hope for it to happen?

BH: Sure. That was—you know, I never—I don't think I ever really thought that I would be in the TV repair, or TV and radio repair business as such. I thought it was maybe like a stepping stone to something bigger, you know. And it was a start. Because I didn't really have aspirations to go on to college. It wasn't something that my parents talked about, you know, their big goal was to graduate from high school because neither one of them did. And it always bothered my Mother that she didn't, more so than my Dad. My Dad, I think, went to the eighth grade and I think my Mother went to the tenth grade. And back then eighth grade was, for him, you know, on the farm, that was pretty good, you know? So he looked at it—she looked at it as altogether different. You know—eh-uh-eh-uh—she really wished she would've finished, you know.

DC: Did many of your classmates go on to college?

BH: [pause] Some did. But after, you know, after high school I couldn't tell you, right now, *anybody* that I knew that was going on to college. Nobody that I knew. I think most of them were looking to get jobs. Some immediately went into the service. I don't know of anybody—and I'm, you know—I'm trying to think through my friends and things like that—that I know of that, "OK, I'm going to college."

DC: Don't remember.

BH: No. No. But I'm, I'm relatively certain that a few did. But I don't think many.

DC: But at that time, at least you had your sights set on the radio and electronics trade school.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DC: And then you completed that and then on a lark went in the Navy.

BH: Yup. Yup.

DC: And then what happened then? Where did you go?

BH: I ended up in the—I ended up at Great Lakes—I did my boot camp there.

DC: OK, where is that?

BH: In Illinois. Waukegan, I think.

DC: Waukegan, all right.

BH: Yeah. And from that through tests and whatever, I ended up going to electronics school right there at Great Lakes after boot camp. And spent—I think, for some reason it seems like it was twenty-two weeks or something like that. Left there, was assigned to go to a ship and ended up on the *Saratoga*, which is an aircraft carrier. And wasn't long in the Navy after that. I think—I met the ship at Mayport, Florida. It had come back from the Mediterranean. And in between the time I left Great Lakes and it came back to port, I was in Norfolk, Virginia for a short period of time, just kind of like in a holding pattern and not doing too much there, you know. Just little work details on a daily basis and that's how they kind of worked that. And then I went—I ended up going down to Mayport, Florida, which is outside Jacksonville, on the ocean. And picked up the ship there. It went from there, and my whole sea duty was comprised of going from there up to Portsmouth, Virginia. It was, it was great, you know. We did make it outside the—what is that. . .

DC: Territorial waters?

BH: Territorial waters, because I remember buying a carton—I could buy cigarettes for a buck, a carton then, you know. It was a little bit cheaper.

DC: Duty free, huh?

BH: Yeah, right.

DC: So what did you do on that brief voyage?

BH: I was assigned to a deck crew at the time. And for the most part, I had an officers' head that I took care of. And I was still trying to get into the electronics and, you know, and getting into that portion of it. It ended up I—it ended up in 1959, we were still in dry-dock and one of the local people had made a request of the Navy there, of the yards there in Portsmouth, and there were a lot of ships there and a lot of Navy personnel. Somehow they had a son, a four-year-old son who was undergoing a heart transplant, some valves and things like that. And he had rare blood. And so what they wanted to do is they wanted to see if there was any donors, you know, because it was going to be quite expensive. So they

found seven of us in the—and I was one of those seven that had that type of blood. And we eventually went up to Richmond, Virginia and donated our blood and unfortunately the little boy died. But it wasn't long after that I donated blood that I had a seizure. And it had happened once before when I donated blood and I just thought it was, you know, yeah. Well, it cut my career in the Navy a little bit short. They sent me over to the hospital in Portsmouth, did a lot of—did a lot of testing on me—didn't find anything. And eventually it came down to, "Well, do you want to stay in the Navy, finish out your tour, or do you want to go back home?" I thought, "What the heck? I'll go back home." So, honorably discharged, but it only—my service was only, probably right around two, two and a half years. I don't know—I don't remember the exact dates when I—so that was the extent of my navy career.

DC: What had your initial training been like? What was that like, in Waukegan?

BH: A lot of marching. A lot of schooling. We did schools—I'm trying to think what the schooling was like. I remember—*all* military stuff. I mean, you know, you learned how to use different guns, small arms and some of the bigger stuff. Learned a little bit about how to—how to live aboard ship, even though you weren't on the ship. You know, you just—different things, how you—for example, during general quarters, if that was ever sounded, which direction you run and things like that. Did things like with gas and all that kind of stuff. Learned how to put out fires, because, you know, fires—even though you're surrounded by water, you know, those ships can go down, so you learn how to put out fires and things like that. A lot of marching, though, as I recall. Learning how to march, you know, in formation and things like that. We must've done pretty good. We were the—you won flags. You did, oh you did, like, competitions between companies and things like that, and every time you did something or you—then you get a flag. And we ended up being the flag company. So we had the most flags won during boot camp and that give us number one or something when we graduated, you know. That was kind of a big deal.

DC: Was your buddy with you, did you get assigned . . .

BH: He was. We were both in the boot camp together. He—after boot camp, though, he went to Norman, Oklahoma. There's a—in the Navy, there's the air side of it and then there's the sea side. And then he became an airman. I became a seaman and he was an airman. So he went that way, and that's—I think I saw Frank once—he became a lifer. And he stayed the rest of the time in the service. He's dead now. He died, oh, maybe seven, eight years ago, I think. And he stayed and retired from the Navy.

DC: Where were the people from that you were in training with?

BH: Everywhere. I mean, I remember one of them came in particular from Arizona—couldn't swim. And they had a neat way of teaching you how to swim. They had a swimming pool and you jumped in the pool. Because you had to tread water, swim, tread water. And what they had was is, they forced you in there and they might have a lone, maybe like a four by—or no, two by two probably. And on the end of that two by two they had a big wad of what appeared to be leather, and I'm sure it wasn't duct tape, but somehow it was held

onto that long stick. And that stick was probably fifteen, twenty feet long. And if they saw you were going to drown, they'd hold that stick out to you and you'd grab hold of it and they'd keep you up, you know. And then they'd pull it away again, you know, tell you, "Hey, you got to learn how to swim." And I remember the guy from Arizona couldn't swim. And he was our company clerk, and I don't think he graduated with us. He—that swimming became a—and he was in college. He was—I don't think he was a graduate, but I think he had spent a couple years in college. And unfortunately, there was also what we had, military indoctrination training. And if you weren't—if you weren't—if you didn't comply, you went there. You complied there. And he ended up going over there because, because—and I think it all started because he couldn't swim. And then he became a little bit belligerent about it and, you know, the way they—so they, "You're over there!" And it was a—it was a process by which—I remember, you used to—we used to march up to the mess hall, and whoever was your group leader, he'd run over and tell, "OK, company so-and-so is here." OK, and they'd tell you when you were in line. And then we always stood out there, probably, you know, at ease or something like that, but still in formation. And if an MIT group came up—and they never marched, they always ran—we had to come to attention and then we'd turn away from them. They were supposedly a disgrace so we wouldn't even acknowledge their existence. They did get to eat before us, though. When they came up there, they got right in there. They ran in there. And it was jostling and things like that and they couldn't do anything back, you know, MIT. If you ever see them come, some guy, you bump them and, you know. So it wasn't the best of duty. But their barracks was right next to ours. And they marched all night long. They stood duty and I mean, they'd get up, you'd hear them get up: "OK, back out on the [?]." You know, they break you down because that's what they want to do. They want to break you down and then they'll build you up. And with those guys, just took them a little bit longer to be broken. Yeah. But that was boot camp, you know? I did sing in the choir, I found out—I had two friends I graduated with that had gone into the service prior to me. And they were over on main side. I found out that if I wanted to sing in the choir and, of course, go to church, I could get out of boot camp and go over to main side one night a week, you know, and practice, so—and then on Sunday of course I got to go to church over there. So I did that. And I got to see my two buddies.

DC: OK, they were there.

BH: They were twins. There was two guys that graduated. The one that I worked with, he had gone to Waterford Township. But we were all, you know, somewhat friends.

DC: Did you enjoy singing?

BH: Oh yeah. Yeah, in fact, I sang in the church even after. In fact, I still do a little singing now. I get a little—I'm starting to learn to play the piano. So there's three of us that get together and we sing a little bit and play our instruments.

DC: So it wasn't a stretch to join the choir.

BH: No, no. No, no it wasn't a stretch. Because I—part of your Catholic school upbringing is

you sing. You know, sing at church. So, and in choirs, you know, boys' choir. And I was in that, so you know, it wasn't strange to me or anything.

DC: So anyways, you had your mysterious seizure, then, after giving blood and you got your honorable discharge. What did you do then?

BH: Then I came out of the service and I drew unemployment for a few months. . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

BH: . . . yeah, my cousin. And him and I were fairly close. He was a little bit older than me. He was a year or two older than me. And he called me one day and he says, "Hey, I went down to Willow Run," he says, "I got a job down at Fisher Body." And he says—I can't remember what it was he was doing—but he says, "I'm on afternoons." He says, "Why don't you go down there and get a job?" And he says, "You and I will ride together." And I says, "Sounds good to me!" So this was like a Friday I went down there, and he had been there for a week or so. I went down there and I says, "I want to get job." They said, "Yeah," you know, hired me in. I says, "And I want afternoons." They says, "That's even better. We can fix you up. Report Monday afternoon." So I come back home, I called my cousin, said, "Hey, I'm all set, Monday afternoon." I says, "Come on by"—because I didn't have a car. He had a car. And I says, "Come on by and pick me up." And I says, "I'll be ready to go to work." He says, "Hell," he says, "I quit! I wouldn't work—I wouldn't work down there in that place. You know, it's too far to drive," and all that. I said, "Oh man!" So I—we worked it out. My Dad worked it to where he came home and I borrowed the car and I drove down to Willow Run to work. And I lived in . . .

DC: Did you have enough time to make it?

BH: Yeah. Just barely. I think I had to report to work at 3:30. And I think he was out of work at, like, 2:30 or something. And I just went down Telegraph Road, to [I-]94, and I made it, you know. And I think what happened eventually was is that he ended up getting another car, and so I got to use it. And it wasn't long, because I bought a car. As soon as, you know, I got a paycheck I thought, "Wow, I'm," you know, "I'm making big bucks." I was, I think I made like $2.11, or something like that, an hour, you know. That was big money then. So I—you know, I—eventually I bought a car. And I think I bought that in, like, October of '59.

DC: Well what was that first job that you got down there?

BH: I was unloading rail cars on the rail dock. Everything that came into Willow Run. They built Corvairs. And they—everything that came in—because we didn't have our own press or anything like that. They brought all the parts in—the fenders, you know, that type of

thing. And my job was to work with a crew and unload those.

DC: So it was just assembly there?

BH: Yes. Yep, just assembly. We were separated from Chevy. Fisher Body did all your body work for all the divisions, and then they either went to Chevy or Pontiac or Buick or whatever. Fisher Body was the body makers. And I wasn't there too long. I probably stayed on that job for three or four months, I think. And then eventually I found there was openings in the materials department. Materials department wasn't near as hard work, only I ended up being—what did?—I was a—what did they call my job? At any rate, I filled the different sealer tanks within the trim side of the plant as opposed to the body shop side. And that was—you just took fifty-five gallon drums and placed them where they needed to be and some of them had a mechanism that came down right over the top of the drum and sucked the stuff out. Some of them you had to fill manually, you know.

DC: And what stuff was it that you were putting in?

BH: It was sealer. Different sealers that they used to . . .

DC: OK. To seal different parts.

BH: Yeah, different—some was waterproofing, some of it was glue, you know, so different things.

DC: Yeah. Well let's go back a second to the unloading of the freight cars. Tell me more about what that was like.

BH: Um—I'm trying to think, because I wasn't there too long.

DC: I know, just three or four months.

BH: Yeah. And I remember the—if it was that long, even, you know I mean, it might have been even shorter than that. But I remember the—primarily there was two types of cars that I remember unloading: the body parts, the sheet metal parts and then the screws and fasteners and that type of thing. And what they would—they would come in in racks, and we had little hand—hand dollies, I guess they were like. They had long, long feet on them. And so what you'd do is you'd kind of work those things in—I think they were—oh I don't think these were electric operated back then. And you had to get those to where you could get them under there, and it seems to me as though you had a hand crank, and that raised it up, raised those feet up, and then it would raise the rack up. And then you could pull it out of the car. And then you went in, because, you know, there would be a rack in the doorway, and then all the way back to this end, and the door in the rail cars were in the center. So then you had to go in there and get that and just pull a little back enough to where you could get it over the plate, and then get out of that car and then do the same thing. And eventually you got to where you could work either end. And once you got those, like first three, three racks probably, out of there, then you could work pretty easily

getting them out of the car. And then you could bring them out.

DC: But it was all manual.

BH: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was manual then. Right. Eventually I unloaded cars in Drayton, but they were trucks, you know, and we never had any of those, those hand manual things. But back then we did. And that was '59. Yup. Yup, and that's what I remember mostly about it. You'd get cut every now and then because there wasn't too much protective equipment back then, you know. They had gloves but, you know, they were cotton gloves and you're looking at sheet metal.

DC: That's not a good match-up.

BH: And not all those racks came in—you know, they were put on there very nicely. But in the jostling of the rail cars and things like that, you know, sometimes they'd—the racks would just—they wouldn't overturn, but they'd break loose, you know. I mean, they'd just—and parts would be all over. You had to go in there and carry them out then. You know, so different things like that.

DC: Did you ever see anyone get, you know, hit by one of those loads coming loose?

BH: No, no. No. I remember once *I* did, but I never saw anybody else.

DC: What happened?

BH: Ah nothing. This was when I was up at Drayton.

DC: Oh OK, this was later.

BH: Yeah, later on. But nothing, nothing that I recall down there.

DC: Well who were you working with, unloading freight trains?

BH: You know, I don't re-—I remember—I remember a guy and his first name was Tony. And I remember he lived in, around—I'm going to say around Garden City. Not—but not far off Telegraph because I know I—every now and then I used to pick him up or take him home from work, one of the two. He eventually became a supervisor. But the reason I knew where he lived was is that he also on the side had a job where he put intercom systems in new homes. And I worked with him for awhile doing that, you know. I remember he had a microwave oven. The first microwave oven I ever saw, and he had to show me all that: "Watch this, I can make a cup of coffee in a minute!" And he'd pop that water in there and put instant coffee in it.

DC: Is that right? Wow.

BH: Yeah. And I wasn't a coffee drinker then. So, you know, I didn't learn to drink coffee in

the service or anything like that. But, yeah I remember, Tony was probably the only guy that I really remember on the rail dock.

DC: OK. Had he been there long? Were many of those . . .

BH: You know, they'd opened up, I think, probably late '58. I think it was—I think some people had '58 seniority. And so, you know, and I was still one of the, in '59 I was still a newer person in there. Because as it turned out, then, as I found out that seniority counted, you know, then I could move around.

DC: Yeah. But were any of these people older?

BH: Yeah, most of them were. Some were younger, but a lot of them—I was probably only, what was I? I was [short pause] twenty-one.

DC: Yeah, about that.

BH: Yeah.

DC: How many of you were out there unloading freight cars?

BH: [pause] Ten, twelve.

DC: That's a lot.

BH: Yeah. Oh, there was a lot of freight cars that came in, you know, to [?] those. You're running sixty cars an hour, you know, that's four fenders to a car. You know, so you—that's how many, you know—and everything came in because we just didn't have a press room at all. We didn't press any of our parts.

DC: So all that you're hauling out by hand.

BH: Yep. Oh yeah. Yep, all of it. Yep. We'd haul it all. They had—then they had gasoline powered Hi-Lo's that would then move it on. We just, we took it out of the cars, set it up, and they'd come and then they would take it over to the body shop.

DC: OK, so you would just get it out of the train car, not too much farther beyond that.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. Right. That's all we would, just take it to.

DC: And they couldn't get those Hi-Lo's in the train cars?

BH: Yeah, yep. Yep. Yeah. That's the way they did it back then.

DC: That's a lot of physical labor.

BH: It is. It is. And of course, I guess labor was cheap. I'm pretty sure it was $2.11. I think—I don't know for sure, but that rings a bell.

DC: Yeah. How did you like the commute?

BH: Um, I didn't. You know, it took an hour to get down there, and an hour then back home. So, you know, I was gone probably ten and a half hours a day. Afternoons, though, I got home—let's see, if I went in at 3:30 I probably got out around 11:00. I was home probably around midnight, 12:30, something like that. Sleep, get up, go to work. For the most part, you know what I mean, that was about it. You didn't do too much, you know. I still—I was still living at home. And I didn't do—you know, there wasn't too much to do, you know, get started at, because then you'd have to go to work. You'd have to leave for work, you know, an hour or an hour and a half early, so. Two o'clock, you know, I was leaving for work.

DC: Do you remember your boss at all at that first job?

BH: You know, I do. And I'm pretty sure Les was his first name. And I'm pretty sure that he was an ex-Lion. A lineman for the Lions. And I—I can't really think of his last name now. Big guy. *Big* guy, you know. [could have been Les Bingaman]

DC: Real big?

BH: Yeah, he was a good-size guy. He was, you know. Big shoulders, you know. Looked like he had been an athlete in his day but also looked like he had hurt a *lot*, you know, just by the way he walked, you know. And he wasn't too bad a guy. He really wasn't. Most of the people that I worked down there for were really pretty good people, most of them. I didn't have too many problems. I had some, but not too many.

DC: When you had problems, what were they?

BH: Eventually what I did, I moved into the materials department and—with a sealer job—and eventually I moved from the sealer job to feeding the lines, you know. And I had an area that was—that the cars were made in the body shop, went into the paint shop, and went into the ovens, which were up above. And then they'd come back down around. And then they'd start getting the trim in them. And I remember—I think I had—I was over in headliner or sunshades, I guess, and they had probably door handles and that type of thing. But there were three of us guys that hung around pretty much, you know, together. And one of the things we used to do was drink, finally eventually begin drinking coffee. And we used to match coins, "OK, who's going to buy it?" Well, when we were on afternoons there wasn't, you know, not too many big wheels or anything like that around. So it was never a problem. Well I remember one night we were matching coins, you know, OK, you know. And you matched until, you know, you were out. Unbeknownst to us, over on—the night shift superintendent is taking somebody around on a tour. And here we are, we're flipping coins, you know. And so he got our supervisor and we got written up for gambling.

DC: Oh, for gambling?

BH: Yeah, for gambling. And I got a balance of three days off. Never knew—never knew anything about the union or anything at that time, you know. Didn't call the committeeman. And what they did, and they did it in such a way as—even though we all got the same thing—one guy got his this week, the next guy—so that, you know, there was no operation that was even shut down by us, you know. And the good part about it was, is that during your three days off, my son was born. So I—you know, I had the time off, so.

DC: So you had gotten married in there somewhere.

BH: Yeah, I had gotten married in 1962.

DC: OK. All right. So you never challenged the suspension?

BH: Never did. Never did.

DC: So it sounds like early on in your career you were—didn't even know about the union.

BH: I really didn't. You know, I knew they were there and I know I paid union dues. I do remember the conversation that the committeeman had with me after I got back.

DC: Which was?

BH: "Don't you ever, ever get written up and never call a committeeman! Don't—I don't care what it is, you call me!" And this guy probably, he probably—based on what I eventually found out, probably wouldn't have been anything but at the worst, maybe a written reprimand, you know. I would of never lost time or anything like that. Never would of had it on my record, you know.

DC: Right, right. You have a gambling disease—you're going to buy coffee.

BH: Yeah, yeah. You know, and I mean, what else they going to get us—I think he could've got us on wasting time, but this guy was, you know, we were gambling. So.

DC: Wrong place, wrong time.

BH: Yep. Yep, exactly. And it wasn't something that, you know, we were clandestinely—you did it. That's how you bought coffee in that plant. So, ah, we just . . .

DC: Were you behind in your work when you were . . .

BH: No, not at all. In fact I, my job was probably about three lines over. And I was over here matching coffee because I knew my job was—and we knew what—in materials, if you were stocking the line it was a relatively easy job. You just walked up the line in the

morning, you saw what was close to being out, and then you filled it up. And you could—you could probably stock a line for two hours, or close to it, you know, on all your—and usually I had, like, I had two lines. And [short pause] I don't know—very seldom did we ever run out. You know, we'd run out if we didn't have the parts, if the parts weren't there.

DC: If the parts weren't at the plant, yeah.

BH: Right, right. Then we'd run out, but for the most part that didn't happen.

DC: So stocking the parts was not so difficult.

BH: It was an easy job. That's why, you know, that's why I wanted it. You know, you come from that rail dock and I got into materials and I just slowly moved, and I—what I did is I—no, I was still on afternoons then. That's right, still on afternoons. Yup.

DC: Did you bid on that job? How did you know when it came open?

BH: Um—you know, I think what happened is, is that you put in for a job and if the opening—if it comes and you've got seniority, you get the job. You know, it's one of those things where you—I think they called them an AVO, you turned in an AVO or something like that to get a—for a particular job. And that's what I did. And they were called—I think they were called line feeders. They may have been stock handlers but I think they were called line feeders at that plant.

DC: Were those coveted jobs? Did other people want them because they were easy?

BH: Sure, sure. They were a lot better than being tied to the line.

DC: So you could get it with just three or four years' seniority?

BH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, because a lot of people came in after me, you know. And so, you know, the guys that had probably the best jobs were inspectors, or some of your skilled tradesmen. Now those guys had the time, you know, so—and those jobs were gone. So the next best thing you could do is get a job that was off the line, which was materials in this case.

DC: Yeah. Let's see—I didn't hear much, though, about the—you started telling me a little bit about loading the sealers and materials and stuff like that. Tell me more about that job. I mean, what . . .

BH: I guess the job—the job was somewhat of a heavy job, you know, because you were—even though you had dolly, you still had to sling those full barrels around and they weren't—I didn't have to pick them up, of course, I couldn't, you know.

DC: Right, fifty-five gallons.

BH: But I did—part of that was I had to do second floor up in the ovens where the cars would go through the ovens. And I had to get sealer up there. That was the most time-consuming job because they had an elevator, and they had an elevator shaft. And then what they had, they had an electric hoist. They had a little cage—you took and put a full one in that electric hoist, you went upstairs, you hit the button, it would bring it up, you'd take that out, and you'd take an empty, you'd send the empty down. Then you'd go downstairs, take the empty out . . .

DC: Just the drum itself?

BH: Just the empty drum, yeah. That's all, it was just big enough for a fifty-five gallon drum.
DC: You couldn't go with it, OK.

BH: And I used to have to do that. And you'd do that—oh, you tried to do it only once, maybe twice a night. And what you tried to do, if you could, you'd stock enough up there. And I knew the guy on days, and him and I, that's one place that we tried not to shortchange each other because it took so much time and it was just up and down stairs, you know what I mean? It wasn't even—the stairs weren't even near the elevator, or the elevator shaft. They were somewhere else, you know, and you had to walk down these—and it wasn't like walking up eight flights, or eight stairs or something like that. There was probably thirty stairs that you had to walk up, you know? It just—it was time-consuming. So we tried to take care of each other on that. We tried to take care of each other all along, but sometimes, you know . . .

DC: What are other ways you could take care of each other?

BH: Well, you'd—all your places—almost all your places had, like if it was sealer, like a glue type, you had two tanks. And you could always fill one when it went empty, and they would run on the other one. You just had to do the valve things. If, in fact, you know, you didn't get around to filling this one and this other one was getting low—let's say it got down to a quarter of a tank or something like that—they may run out of sealer. And you know, you don't expect it. You go around, and you try and check your tanks before, and usually all you had to do was hit them. And you could tell, you know, you've got a different noise. And you knew. Well, if you didn't get over to like—because you had, we had the whole soft trim area. And that included the—what'd we call that? That's where the seats were made and that type of thing—all the way over to final assembly. And if you didn't get over, they may run out. And then you'd get a call.

DC: How long would it take to get through the whole circuit?

BH: Oh, probably forty-five minutes.

DC: Oh, OK.

BH: Yeah, probably that long.

DC: So when you went on your shift . . .

BH: Yeah, the first thing you did, you had to make that circuit. Unless let's say you had one that was going out, you know. You had to fix—fill that one. Some of the machines, they had, they were like a big rubber pump, I guess, and they had a rubber sealer fit right down into the fifty-five gallon drum. And then those would—as that sucked it out then they would slowly just seep to the bottom. And then there was another one over here setting next to it. Well sometimes, you know, that one may be empty and the other one's getting close. Well you could *see* that right off the bat, you knew that. But the other tanks, you couldn't see. You know, you'd have to give them a whack and, "Oh, my God," you know. And then you were trying to—and some—they wouldn't shut the line down usually. But if they did . . .

DC: If they didn't have sealer, you mean?

BH: Yeah. Well, you know.

DC: What would happen?

BH: Well, they'd probably catch it in final inspection, if anything.

DC: They'd keep—they'd run it right through?

BH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. [laughs] We didn't—the line didn't stop too much. Quality wasn't, you know, major. It was something and if, yeah, it was OK. You know, it isn't like—I think they do a *lot* better job today than what they were back then. One of the things we had, there were inspectors, but inspectors carried a ball-peen hammer and a block of wood. And that's the way—and all your cars that came through there—the doors, they adjusted the locks and all—they'd just hit them.

DC: Oh really?

BH: Oh yeah. That's how they did it. They'd try the hoods, you know, and the trunk, you know, and in case that was reversed—if it didn't fit, you know, you whapped it. And it fit, you know.

DC: You mean that actually worked a bunch of times?

BH: Oh, it worked every time.

DC: Every time?

BH: *Every* time. I mean that—and these guys, that was their job. And there was probably about four or five of those guys towards the end of the line and that's what they did. They'd hit them. They had little red blocks and I say they're wood but they were—I

don't—they probably weren't. They were—they were kind of a reddish-colored blocks of something. So wide and about so high, like that. And they would just, they knew how—and they're big, it wasn't just a little ball-peen hammer—probably the sixteen ounce, twenty ounce, something like that, where they'd—yeah, and they'd hit those . . .

DC: It wouldn't dent anything?

BH: No, no, it was usually—it wasn't the sheet metal they were hitting. It was the lock mechanism or the latch mechanism, something like that. Yeah. Those doors—and they'd—doors—doors didn't fit, they'd have a little piece of wood there, and they'd bend those doors and, you know, the hinges, and just bop them—just *thud thud*, there it works. Those guys were good.

DC: Would that repair hold, then? I mean, would that be good?

BH: Oh yeah. Probably be good until well after you sold it.

DC: After you sold it. [laughs]

BH: Yeah. [laughs] I don't, you know, I don't know—if you went out and looked at your car today, if it catches a little bit. And I'm sure cars used to do that. I can—seems to me as though I remember people kind of lifting up on their car when they closed the door or go to open it or something like that, you know? If they had those inspectors around, they could fix them right quick.

DC: What would've happened if you had said, you know, like three engines got through without sealant or something like that?

BH: Now these weren't engines. We never did an engine because that was a Chevy side. Our sealers were mostly—some of them were glue and that's what kept your deadeners in place. Some of them were on the rubbers that went around your windshield and back light.

DC: OK, so the rubber seal around all that. But what—the sealant tank was empty, and some stuff went through . . .

BH: Yeah, went through. Usually that would be caught and we had a water test area in this big long shed. And it would be found. They had ultraviolet lights that they'd shine in it, and if they saw water, OK, they'd mark it. And when it got over to the inspection part, before it went to Chevy, they'd probably pull that off. And if they didn't fix it right there, water test, because water test usually they had sealers, you know, extra sealer there, things like that. And they'd try and fix that there. Because the windshield went—windshield and back lights went in right then, just before water test. And so those were easy to pop back out again and just edge with sealer guns, then, you know. They'd just—and they'd fill it up with sealer. Sometimes they'd run it back through. Most of the time, nah, you know. You could if you had a break in the line, but if you didn't have a break in the line, you weren't going to—they weren't going to.

DC: You just ran.

BH: Yup. And so it passed inspection, you know. Oh yeah, we fixed it. Boom, and it was on its way.

DC: So why do you suppose there was no concern about the—or less concern about the quality?

BH: Well I think then it had to do with, cars were selling. We didn't really have the competition from any foreigners. VW was probably the biggest competition. That wasn't, you know, that wasn't—they weren't hurting GM, or any of the Big Three. Well I don't think the Japanese were—if they were selling cars here, I wasn't aware of it. Probably VW was the only thing that was in *any* way competitive, you know. It would be probably a little bit competitive with the Corvair. I don't know that it would be, even that, you know. Corvair was a different car. Engine in the back, same as a VW, but different you know, so. I don't think there was that much—there wasn't a lot of concern about quality. Quantity, yeah. You know, we had to do sixty-two an hour and you did sixty-two an hour, you know? And that's—I'm sure that's what the—that's what the management was being rewarded, you know. It wasn't how many quality cars you got out but how many cars you got out. How many would come out the end of that line, you know? And we used to stack them up. We know Chevy used to have problems and we'd stack those cars up. We were getting ours. We never—our lines didn't shut down because of Chevrolet. It had to be really, really major. Because there were—you know, from our place it went on to a conveyor, which was different from our line, and just went up over—there was a road that separated Fisher Body and Chevy, so it went up a grade, went across, and then somewhere into Chevrolet, into no man's land!

DC: The great beyond! Yeah, right.

BH: Whatever was *over* there! We couldn't go over there. It just went over to Chevy.

DC: And that was, what, the other part of the plant?

BH: That was—yeah, that was the other division. Fisher Body was a division, Chevy was a division. We never—I want to say a different local union. I know it was different management, so I think we were a different local union. I think.

DC: Now this is the old bomber plant?

BH: No, I don't think . . .

DC: This is GM Willow Run.

BH: Yeah, it was GM Willow Run.

DC: Was it the old Kaiser plant?

BH: Yeah, I don't know—you know, it could have been part of that complex, Kaiser. I don't know for sure. It may have been. I may have known that at one time. But I can't . . .

DC: Well I need to look into that and figure it out, too.

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Well what was the workforce like when you were working in the sealants and also when you were doing the line feeder work? What were your—I mean, who was working with you? What kind of workforce did you have?

BH: I guess age wise I think I was probably one of the younger ones. Not to say that there weren't some younger than me, but they were—I think most of the guys were older than me. And they were from different areas. I don't think too many were right there from Ypsilanti, or Belleville I guess is the actual area. Some from Flint made that commute every day down.

DC: Wow.

BH: Yeah. I picked up a couple guys on Telegraph Road almost every day and drove them in. Eventually I found guys up this way that we rode together.

DC: You carpooled?

BH: Yeah, yup.

DC: So people were drawn from all over.

BH: Yeah, they were. Yup. It was a big hiring, you know, center I guess at that time. Because jobs were, I think, a little bit hard to come by, you know.

DC: It was a big recession, '58-'59. That would've been . . .

BH: Yeah. And so . . .

DC: How about—how was the racial makeup of the workforce?

BH: Um, I'm going to say probably mostly white. But there was a good mix of black people there. I don't remember too many Hispanics. I don't—quite a few black people.

DC: Were they doing the same kinds of jobs as everyone else?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, really they were.

DC: You didn't have a foundry there or anything, did you?

BH: No, no foundry. But they did have a body shop. But you know, I didn't see, that I recall, any forms of discrimination in hiring.

DC: Were there any black line feeders?

BH: Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to think of what his name was. O.C., I remember, he was one. We also had the guy—he drove a truck or jitney, I guess, and he hauled out our rubbish, you know, our broken down boxes and things like that. He was part of materials department. Materials department wasn't big as far as the line feeders go. We called ourselves materials department and we worked in the trim side of the plant. So we were—and I don't remember—I don't remember any black guys working out on the rail dock, you know, like I did.

DC: Some people have told me that, you know, blacks were all concentrated in a particular department or something like that, but that didn't seem to be the case here.

BH: Not, not there. No, they were throughout the building.

DC: How did blacks and whites get along at work?

BH: I don't think that there was a—I don't think there was any big issues about black and white. I don't know that we—we didn't socialize outside of the plant. Inside, yeah we'd, you know—it wasn't any problem to go, go with a black guy to go have coffee or something like that. There wasn't any of that. I don't re—I don't remember us having any problems, with racial problems at all. [cough]

DC: Were there any women workers?

BH: No.

DC: No, OK.

BH: No. No.

DC: So how long did you stay on the materials job?

BH: Probably about—well I'll tell you what. It was 19-—well my son was born in '62. And I decided then that—and I was still on afternoons all that time—I decided then that I wanted to go on day shift. To do that, I didn't have enough time, seniority-wise, to bump onto days. So I bumped onto the line.

DC: Oh, you did?

BH: Yeah. I put in for the line, a job on the line. And as soon as I got that then I knew I had seniority to get—bump onto days. So I did that.

DC: OK. So what was the line job you won?

BH: Well, I had a couple. The first one I had was installing, I think they were—I don't—regulators. Window regulators. Regulators. They were a piece of metal, about so long, and it had a, like a geared—or a gear on the end, a half gear. And what that did is, you bolted that in place and when you cranked, that thing moved—your window went up and down. It's a very simple operation. But I remember I had to reach—had to reach inside the door like this, hold it back, and I had to put three nuts on it, I think—three or five. And by the third day, that finger and that thumb was so raw from—because you couldn't wear gloves and do it, you know. Or if you could, they didn't give you gloves, so. And eventually I know I went to first aid and I came back to the job. Couldn't do the job, so they put me on the, on an offline job building convertible tops for the Corvair, which was a pretty good, pretty easy job because you only did, I don't know, eight or ten an hour. You know, convertibles weren't a major seller, so I did that job for—the convertible—the one I only did for like three days, I think.

DC: OK, the . . .

BH: The regulator job. And then I went down to convertible tops.

DC: So you stayed there, then? You didn't go back to the window . . .

BH: No, no. Nope, they sent me down there. I could do it because it was a stapler, you know, more of a stapler job. I just had to pull and staple. And I got that job, and I probably was on that job a year and a half. I'm trying to think—'62. Yeah, probably a year and a half, so it would probably get me into . . .

DC: The convertible hood, or convertible top?

BH: Yeah, yeah. Offline job. Had a little carousel that went around and we just—we built the tops, right there. And so I'm going to say maybe a year later, that probably got me to '63.

DC: How did you like that job?

BH: It wasn't a bad job, you know. It was OK. Had a good supervisor. He was a pretty nice guy. Yeah.

DC: So what was good about it?

BH: Good about it was, is that you weren't really tied to the line. Guys worked pretty much together. There was probably eight or ten of us in that area, and everybody knew everybody and you knew everybody's job. So if a guy, you know—if you had to go to the john because the only time you could go to the john is during your break. You know, you had tag relief guy, relief man come around, OK. You did what you had to do in that ten minutes, whatever it was. I mean, the johns weren't always close, you know, and they

were always upstairs, you know. So you had to climb the stairs, go to the john, come back—you had to be on the job.

DC: All in ten minutes?

BH: He wouldn't leave you, but he would short you the next day. You know, he got his time, too. You weren't going to get the relief guy. You couldn't get him. He'd come back, "OK, by the way, you've been on relief four minutes to make up for yesterday." And you better—you were back then. So you learned. So.

DC: But you said your supervisor was OK?

BH: Yeah. Connie Breeding [sp?] was one of our supervisors. I remember him. And yeah, he was OK. Yeah. Yeah.

DC: What made him OK?

BH: Connie pretty much let you do your job. Pretty much stuck up for you, you know, if somebody's coming around, general supervisor, something like that. You know, "Ah, they're OK," you know, "everybody's doing OK." We didn't have a lot of discipline problems, though we did strike that plant.

DC: Did you?

BH: Yeah. But I think it was a national strike. And I'm going to say that had to be around [short pause] '64, I think is when it was. Yeah.

DC: Do you remember what the issues were?

BH: I really don't. I—you know, I don't know what the issues were. And they were probably national issues—it was probably over the national contract or something like that and I think probably all of GM went out. And I do remember being on the picket line, but maybe only once or twice. And then somebody found out that I was from the Pontiac area, they said, "That's too far for you to drive so don't come down here anymore." I—you know, I'm going to—I don't recall receiving strike pay, but I probably did. You know, I may have gotten fifteen dollars a week or something like that.

DC: Do you remember how long you were out?

BH: I'm going to say [short pause] three weeks. Yeah, something like that. Yeah. And I don't recall for sure.

DC: So did you get onto days then?

BH: Yeah, I went on day shift.

DC: How long did it take?

BH: Not long. Not long to do that. Yeah. Yeah. It was probably, you put in for it and maybe a couple weeks later you had it, you know, I mean because you could bump any time, you know, and so. And usually the less the seniority you had, the worse the job was. And you knew that you were going to get a job like that, so I think that's where I got the regulator job. Nobody really wanted that job. Then I went to that job, to the convertible top line. Probably spent a year there. And then I went over to—went on the—right on the line and I was—because I think they had different—there was different pay rates and things like that, depending on what your job was. And the line was paying probably the most, you know. So I went on—bumped onto the line. And I was putting on door handles and they used to have what they called wind lace, and it was a piece of material where the cars were rolling together, and it was on the door, right around the door. We used to take this fabric, and it was probably vinyl, and we'd put it on there. What it did is it eliminated the wind noise from around the door. It gave it a little bit of insulation and noise protection.

DC: That was your new job.

BH: Oh yeah. All new cars used to have that. And it was a—all I had to do on that job—it was a little bit more difficult in that you had to color match everything. And so therefore, as the job was coming down the line there was a tag on the front of it and it had certain numbers. And you knew what colors the numbers represented. It didn't, for example, tell you "red," you know, but you knew that maybe two was red, you know, so. And there was a lot of numbers on there.

DC: But you'd pick out the right number for your job.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. Yup. And then also I put door handles on, and depending on whether or not it was the deluxe or just the regular model determined which door handles went on there. I didn't put in the speakers, but I think—I think I threw them in the car. That was, you know—and you had a minute to do that, you know.

DC: A minute for each car, to put the door handles on, the window . . .

BH: Yeah. And if it was a four-door, you did both sides, you know. Or both doors on your side. And same with the door handles—put that on. Because somebody had already put the [short pause] door panels in. And so all you did—and you had a little hammer and you just stuck them on there. You'd hit them on there. [laughs] You get to be pretty good with a hammer. Rubber hammer, you know. So it was pretty good.

DC: So was a minute enough time for all that?

BH: You know, when you first started out it wasn't. You'd take about a week or so on, yeah. Because at the end of your shift you were working eight or ten jobs up the line.

DC: Oh really?

BH: Sure. Because they—they'd allow you to do that, go down to the time clock, wait till the whistle blew, and then you could punch out and leave.

DC: OK.

BH: And then it was like a mad dash to get to the car. You know, I mean it was like—it was like kids in school almost, you know? I can remember guys getting out of there and just *running* to the cars in the parking lot, you know, so they can get out of that parking lot and get the hell out of there. Yep.

DC: Is that how you felt?

BH: Yeah, yeah. At the time. But some of the guys I rode with, they were a little bit older. They didn't believe in that running stuff, you know? [laughs]

DC: How many clocks were there to punch out on?

BH: I'm going to say there was one, two—probably in the whole plant, about four. So I mean the lines did get long. Yeah. There was—of course, you know, you could only punch out at one clock. You had to punch out at your clock.

DC: Oh, you had your assigned clock.

BH: Oh yeah. Yeah, so—the materials guys, we used to be able to get down there a little bit early. You know, you could stock your line up. It was good for, like you know, you'd set it up for an hour anyways, you know. And at a certain time maybe—you couldn't—when you were absolutely done you just couldn't walk down there. You couldn't be down there ten minutes or anything like that.

DC: Right, what would happen if you were then?

BH: Well then, you know, you'd get written up, you know. So you know, usually what happened is, is that—in fact, I can remember when it, when they want to start cracking down, the guys still did everything the same only—along the main aisle way where the clocks were at were racks—and when that clock would hit 3:30, or 11:00, whatever it was, it was just like rats. Wrooooh! They were shot across that aisle way just as quick as they could to get their spot in line, you know. And it'd be, you know, it'd be time. You could punch out right then. But I mean, they were shoving and everything going on, you know, jostling to get out of that place.

DC: Wow. Now would the next shift be all ready to go then?

BH: Ours—we ran a two-shift operation down there, so, and I was on afternoons and so that was that. Yeah.

DC: Yeah, they shut down.

BH: Yeah. But when I came in, you wanted to be there before, because you weren't going to punch in while those guys, they just wouldn't let you, you know. That guy—the last guy to punch in, you were on this side with your card and this whole line was coming out. You didn't have a chance because this guy, when he pulled his card out, you couldn't get it in because he was coming your way. The guy behind had it. So you always got there—you'd try to get there early.

DC: Yeah, so if you were just a minute late you would be screwed.

BH: Yeah, right. You were late and you were going to be docked, you know?

DC: Wow.

BH: Yup.

DC: So was it madness trying to get out of the lot, then, as well?

BH: Yeah, it was because what you had to do, you had to get out of the lot into a narrow—geez it was two lanes, I think, but I think it was one way. Went out onto the road, the access road that went up to the expressway. And yeah, it was kind of like madness. Yeah. A lot of squealing of tires and all kinds of things, you know. So it was kind of madness.

DC: So you went back to this door handle, wind job and all that?

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: How long were you on that one?

BH: I was on that until 1965. And at that point in time, I was trying to get out of Willow Run, because the drive was—I was living right here in this house then. Well not in this house, but at this location, because I tore the house down and built a new one.

DC: OK, all right. You had at least one child at that point.

BH: Yeah, and by that time I had two. And I got two children, a boy and a girl. She was born in '64.

DC: So one in '62, one in '64.

BH: Or '63 and '65. Because we were married in '62. And so what I did was, my next door neighbor was a carpenter and he said, "You know, you could probably get a job as a laborer or something like that." So I—you know, I was getting tired of the drive, so I thought, "OK, I might try that." In the meantime I knew that Pontiac Motor was up here, so I applied there, I think probably at Fisher Body there. And then somebody told me about

the Buick warehouse. And I never even knew—I'd lived here all my—I never knew anything about it. So in 1964, during changeover, I went over here and applied and nothing came up. Well in 1965, I applied again. And because I had good seniority—we went back—higher seniority employees went back first as they were doing the new models. And they had you come back and do all the new stuff, you know. It wasn't a full line or anything like that. And so when I was back there, they called. They said, "Hey, we want you to come to work over here." Well, they wouldn't hire me unless I wasn't working at another plant. And of course I was, so I just went up to my supervisor and said, "I quit." He says, "What?" His name was Ray Jewel and he lived up here off of M-59. I said, "Ray, I quit. I'm going to work somewhere else." And he goes—he knew I rode, and he says, "Well aren't you carpooling?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well why don't you—I'll let you go over there and quit, but last out the shift, will you?" He says, "I'll give you time to go over to personnel and do all that." So he did. On their time I went over and got the relief man to come and relieve me and then I went back and finished up. And I quit there. I was done at Willow Run and came up here and they hired me. Had to go through a physical, which you know, "Ah no," you know, "now I got to"—so I didn't know if it was or not.

DC: So you weren't sure you were really hired.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. I wasn't really sure until after I come back from the physical. Then they . . .

DC: Did you have any concerns, anything with the physical?

BH: I had no physical concerns, you know, but there was always that little, that little in the back of your mind, you know. You know, you might not get this job, you know, well then what are you going to do?

DC: Yeah, so you really went out on a limb there.

BH: Yeah. I'd quit.

DC: Yeah, you were done. You cut your ties, wow.

BH: But they hired me. And I don't know what day this—you know, I don't recall what even day this was. But I started work there.

DC: And what was your job there?

BH: My job there was a picker packer. When I hired—picker packer.

DC: Picker packer, all right. Tell me what that is.

BH: OK. You pick parts and you put them in a box, packed them, and shipped them. Put them on the line and somebody else did all the shipping. But you put—you had a dealer's order that came in. And see, when you went from the—from a, you know, that type of—what do

I want to call that? The—where you build cars . . .

DC: Assembly, or. . .

BH: Yeah, from assembly division over to a warehouse division, I mean, we called that the country club. Because I mean, there was no really *manual labor* in there at all. I mean, you went and picked, for the most part, small parts. Yeah, dealers would send in an order and there may be—we used to call them lines—and on this line he may want ten screws. On this one here he may want, you know, a sun shade. He might want an arm rest, you know. And so you got—you got, I think—you ended up with about a hundred and sixty lines that you had to pick and pack during the course of an eight-hour day. And so you'd go out and you'd get your lines, you'd sort them out, take them as according to location. You'd go pick them. And you had these long carts, about so long, and they were kind of like a double-decker, probably about so wide. And what you did—first thing you did when you got in there, you took pieces of cardboard and laid it on there, and you numbered those: one, two, three, four, five, six and so on and so forth. And then when you get your tags to pick, you'd number them. This dealer would all be number one, this two, three, so on and so forth corresponded to that. So when you picked a part, if you'd written on there number two, then you set that part on number two. If it was number seventeen then you put it on seventeen and so on, till you picked all your parts. And then when you came back, you took his order, you knew all his parts were here at number one, you just take that, put them in box or boxes, tape them up, put them on the line, they went down, and they shipped them out.

DC: Now were these being shipped to service departments at the dealers?

BH: Dealers, yeah.

DC: OK. Right, so if they had to do some kind of repair, or replacement they would . . .

BH: Yeah, yeah. That's what they were. They were ordering their parts. And at that particular time, that was when the divisions had all the warehouses. And we were Buick. And we were—Buick was in Flint and their main warehouse was in Flint. And so we did mostly just, you know, little dealer stuff. You know. Enough to employ probably on that—there must've been twenty-five of us that worked in there. But what a great place to work. I mean, it was—I went in there and you started work at 6:00 in the morning, and I got there a little bit early but there was some people there earlier than me. And I remember the first guy I met, I come walking up to the line. He says, "Hey! You're new here." I says, "Yup." He says, "My name's Jim Mosier [sp?]," got up, come over, shook hands with me, I introduced myself. He said, "Well Bob, it's going to be a good place to work. You're going to love it here." And I did, you know. And everybody—eventually you knew everybody. There was less than a hundred people working there I think. And you knew just about everybody, and everybody was nice to you. They took care of you pretty much. The supervisor there, I remember he taught you how to do the job. I couldn't go out and pick any parts on my own for the first three days. We had what they call single-line dealer orders. And somebody would pick those, and my first job was take those single-line

orders, find the proper box for it, and then—you know, they showed you where those were at—and box those up, and send it off. And I did that probably the first three days. And then the—about the fourth day, then they said, "OK, now we're going to let you pick in the small bin section." Just, again, small parts. So I'd take those, and I got to pick the single-line, see. And then I could pack them out, too, you know. It wasn't for, till a week or so that I was able to go out and do a whole full runs. He did a good job. Buick was a little bit different in their attitude, I think, towards employees. . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . Buick and Fisher Body down there.

BH: Yes. And Buick was a little bit—I'm not going to say they were necessarily lenient in that they were lax or anything like that, but they weren't—didn't come down on you as hard for trivial things. Not saying we didn't have our problems because eventually we did. We had—I eventually became involved in the union there.

DC: At the Buick warehouse?

BH: At Buick warehouse.

DC: OK. Well what in the world could happen there?

BH: Ah, you know, nothing major. But they were—there were things. And I remember our first—our first slowdown was because a general supervisor who used to be an hourly employee—they'd promoted him to general supervisor. Went right, I think it was supervisor, general supervisor—but we had a guy that was our supervisor on the packing line, and this guy would come out and just chew him up one side and down the other, you know. And we knew, we were in—as workers, we were in control of the job. And we knew the supervisor wasn't. And we weren't doing anything, you know. What we were doing was, we were getting done at the end of the day. You know, getting closer and closer at the end of the day. And they didn't kind of like that, you know, they wanted us to be done early, you know. Not that they'd give us any more work or anything, but this guy was a little nervous about things. So all of a sudden, people started slowing down. Our guys started slowing down. And so, I was the only committeeman then, and so he called—he says, "Hey, what's going on out there?" And I says, "Well, you know Tom," I says, "I don't know, but I'll go out and find out." So I went out there, you know, "Hey guys, you know, what's the deal? Still over Bob?" They said, "Yup. The guy doesn't deserve the chewing out that he's getting or any of that kind of stuff. So, until Tom"—and the guy's name was Tom Shanahan—he says, "Until Shanahan starts straightening up, we're slowing down." Well that scared the heck out of Shanahan. I mean you know, if he didn't get those orders shipped on a daily basis, which we *always* did—I mean we were—he was just

nervous, you know. He was just that kind of guy.

DC: Was he likely to run into difficulties if it didn't come out, or was he just a [?]?

BH: Well, it probably would never have happened, but I'm sure that the manager, the plant manager, would have really got after him. I mean, we had like a plant manager, a general supervisor, and then supervisors. That's about all. Maybe a clerk. We had a female clerk, yeah. No, she was the secretary—that's right. So I went in and I talked to Tom. And I says, "Tom, they're mad because you're out here chewing Bob out all the time." And I says, "And until you get off his butt, they're going to slow down." And you know, I says, "They're picking. They're not—you know, they're doing their job. They're getting ladders"—we used to—we used to have to be safe, and you know, you'd have to climb a ladder. Well the ladders were a pain in the butt. So, you know, we'd climb the cages, right up there and just *plunk*, grab the part, come back down, you know. And that's—and it was OK. It was OK unless they wanted to crack down, you know, unless somebody got hurt or something like that, which was very seldom. So I remember Tom saying, "Well! OK, OK. You tell those guys I'll get off Bob's case," you know. "But", he says, "I want you tell them this: I'm not going to talk to them anymore"—to the guys, to the workers. You know, and—because we talked to everybody, you know. So I went out and I told them. Those guys were done in an hour. I mean they just—they were done. And that was—we had an episode once where, and it was—very seldom was it the supervisor that give us any problems. You know, usually they pretty much knew that hey, everybody's going to do their job. We had an incident once where a guy was—this guy was whistling. We had a couple guys in there that were—that were pains in the butt. But we had one guy, he was whistling. And they told him to quit whistling. One of the supervisors told him to quit whistling. And he, you know, like what the heck? So they give him a reprimand—give him a reprimand. And so, you know, I being the committeeman, you know, I would've had to negotiate that. Well some of the guys said, "Pshaw! We know how to handle that." Everybody in that plant started whistling. They whistled and whistled and whistled and whistled. And finally what they did, they said, "OK, we'll tear up the reprimand." You know? OK. And another time, we had what we called a walking break. We didn't have any breaks per se, because we were out and around the plant. But in our contract it said we could go to the candy machine or to the soda machine any time—at any time. There was no problem there. And you could buy a candy bar. So one day, somebody brought in an apple. And they were sitting there at their work area eating this apple. Well, they burn him for wasting time. And we had a good group there. So what did us guys do? We would all go out at lunch hour, and there was some farms around there, you know. So we bought apples. We bought a big bushel of apples, brought them back in, and passed them out to everybody in the plant. Everybody ate their apples. And then we went and said, "OK, now you got to burn everybody. You're not—you just can't . . ." And the same way with the whistling deal. You can't just single out one, burn them. So, and that's usually how we handled things at that location with the Buick management.

DC: Did you try to talk to them first?

BH: Oh yeah. Yeah, which you had to do, you know. But they would always, you know, if they

did it they weren't going to cave in, just you talking to them, you know, I mean, you know. But when everybody in the plant stuck together, you know, then you had them. Because they weren't going to shut that place down. That place was just too well-run—it was, you know, it wasn't a real big place, you know. Eventually it became big. But that goes beyond Buick. When I hired in there, I'll tell you how nice it was. We had our own coffee pots. We didn't have any vending machines in the plant. We had—we owned the coffee pots—we being the UAW people, the hourly employees—and we also owned the pop machine. So we determined the prices. Management, they had—the janitor had to take care of the coffee in the morning. He had to come in early—his job started at 5:30 in the morning. His job—his first job—and we had two of these big coffee urns—and his job was to fix coffee in the morning. And he got paid to do that, you know. And what we did, then we brought in our own mugs and we paid a nickel a cup for coffee. And then the pop machine, I think it may have cost a dime. And that went on—what we did, we kept that money. We had a committee that collected the money and everything. And at the end of the year we had a dinner dance. And we rented a—I think it was a VFW hall. And everybody was entitled to that, management and the hourly represented employees, also. And it was a big deal. We supplied the meal and the beer and the soft drinks. And if you wanted hard stuff you had to bring that yourself. But it was a dance. We hired a band and it was—you know, we made money off that. We eventually—management eventually decided that they weren't going to do that anymore, and probably, around 1967, somewhere around in there, we had to get rid of our coffee machines and the pop machine. And we ended up, I think we ended up—we donated all the money to Children's Home here in Oakland County, something like $1100 or $1700. Something—you know—I mean it was good money we made, you know. But again, a real decent place to work.

DC: It sounds like you all were pretty well organized.

BH: Yeah, we were. Yeah. We had a guy there that was a committeeman and he had come from—there was a plant—there was a plant in Detroit that was also part of Buick, and they were closing that plant down. And what they did is they brought some of those people up here. A lot of those guys that were in that plant down there went to school together, grew up together, and they all hired in to that location together. It was a real small location. And they came up here. One of the guys was their committeeman. And his name was Bob Merito.[sp?] Bob Merito.

DC: Bob Merito.

BH: Yeah. A well-known crime name. You know, in probably around Hazel Park and in that area. But these guys were from Detroit for the most part. And Bomber was our committeeman, and he was the negotiator. And he could—he could get guys to work together. He just had that ability. Nice guy, you know. Since deceased, but a good guy. And he was—I learned a lot from him.

DC: You said you were an alternate committeeman?

BH: Yeah, I was his alternate.

DC: And how did you decide to become an alternate?

BH: He asked me.

DC: He did, OK.

BH: Yeah, he asked me one day. And, you know, it wasn't a place that the people were just charging to become the committeeman there. But at that plant, we had—at that time with the amount of people we had, we had a chairperson who wasn't full-time—he worked in the plant—we had a committeeman who wasn't full-time, and an alternate who wasn't full-time.

DC: That was it.

BH: Yeah. And you had time if you had a call. So, yeah. And we didn't have a lot of calls. But every now and then we did. And Bomber was—he was very good and he could organize people and we all stuck together. You know, it didn't mean that we hated management. But if they did something that we didn't feel was right, everybody was there. You know, if you had every location in the world like that, you know, your problems would be solved a lot sooner.

DC: Did you ever take any of these cases all the way through the grievance procedure?

BH: Sure. Sure. Sure, some of them. Yeah, some of them. In fact, most of them ended up—probably later on, and I'm talking probably closer to the '70s when we really began to expand some—we may—there may have been a few that were going to the umpire, but they have that—that in-between the third step or whatever and the umpire step. I want to say screening, but I know that isn't it. There's a term for it that's used. A lot of the—shakeout meetings. And that's where a lot of stuff got shaken out or didn't go to the umpire. But we didn't have a lot. A lot of our stuff went up to—let me see, what was that? Been a long time. So you had Paragraph 29 and Paragraph 30—second step probably. Second step, I think, was with personnel director and your chairperson, shop committee. Yeah, we had a lot of those cases go up there. Health and safety.

DC: Were those the biggest—health and safety issues?

BH: Um, no I don't think so. Probably the biggest issues that I recall may have been stealing. It's a parts warehouse, you know.

DC: Small parts, at that.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. Good parts. Ah, I mean, you know, carburetors, tachometers, back then—[?] shifters—we used to stock those. Those would disappear. Especially when we started—after we got—I hired in in September, I think it was—August or September of '65. And then around '68, as our business really began to expand, and what they were

beginning to do is bring parts from Flint down to ours and they wanted us to be bigger and bigger. Because that was the intent. Eventually that was going to be their . . .

DC: Moving out of Flint?

BH: Yeah. Yup. And as you got different people in there and there were people who, you didn't know them, and we were—really we were like a family there. And as that happened, you just didn't have time to break people in and explain to them everything, you know, and parts were missing. I remember one incident. We had thirty tachometers come into the plant. And before—they hit the receiving dock, and before they could be put away in the secured area, they were gone. All of them were gone. So the plant manager came out and he got a hold of Bob Merito and told him, "Hey, you know, I just, I can't—that can't happen. You know, those tachs are just too valuable," you know, and you know. "And if we find out who did it. . ." [beeping in background interrupts the flow of conversation—tape turned off for a bit]. . . unless management came out, Bomber came out and said, "Hey. Those tachometers that are missing, we need to find them. They need to reappear." They did.

DC: They did.

BH: They reappeared and they were in the plant manager's office. And his office was—you walked in his office. I was in his office every day. One of the things, we had a little garage and the only way to get into it was to go through his office. I mean, that's how close we were at that place. I mean, it was just . . .

DC: How big was this?

BH: Oh, he had a big office. Yeah, it was a big office. It was, oh, probably from that—you know, square of this room size. Maybe bigger.

DC: How about the warehouse itself?

BH: Warehouse itself wasn't real big.

DC: But you had a hundred people in there.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. It was an L-shaped warehouse. It used to be a Les Hutchinson [sp?] trailer assembly plant. They used to build trailers there. And it was a long warehouse, and then the one end, it went down this way. So I'm going to say—boy, I can't even tell you how many square feet. It's probably close to a million, now, I think. So back then it was probably three, three fifty. You know, somewhere, you know, in that general area. So—and we had—we unitized or boxed things, you know, raw parts. And then put them into stock. And then we would pick those, and over-box them or whatever, you know. So.

DC: When Bomber said he wanted those tachometers back . . .

BH: They came back.

DC: They came back.

BH: They came back, yup.

DC: And how did you feel about these other cases when—you said a lot of your grievances involved theft.

BH: Those were my biggest ones, you know? And I didn't have a lot of those, you know. I remember one in particular and the guy was stealing parts. But . . .

DC: Did you defend him?

BH: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: OK. And how did it come out?

BH: He didn't—what happened was, he didn't steal the parts. He was stealing them, but he noticed somebody watching him. So he just—he moved out of that area, had the parts, but by the time they found him in another area, he didn't have the parts. And they were pretty sure, but they didn't catch him with the parts or anything. So I defended him, yeah. And we eventually won the case. I think he was out for a week before we got him back, but yeah. Part of what I liked as being a committeeperson, and it's probably like being an attorney, is finding flaws in the charges. Because, you know, the burden of proof is on the charger, you know, it isn't on—and the burden of proof is always on management, because they were the ones charging. So what you did was, you tried to save the employee. You know, and I didn't get into this what's right and what's wrong, you know, because if I did that, most employees I wouldn't be able to defend. Because probably, they were breaking a shop rule. I didn't make any rules, but hell, I had to live by them. So I just—it was a challenge to defend people. And I think I did a good job, you know.

DC: So what—you said that Bomber asked you to do it. Did you want to be an alternate?

BH: You know, I never—no, I had come from lower rung and I didn't even have a—I always thought that it was a little unfair that they, that they give me three days off. Especially after a committeeman talked to them, you know? But other than that, you know, I never had any other problems or anything like that and I never considered that a problem. I didn't have any problems at Drayton, you know, to make me run. He just called and said, "Hey, you want to be an alternate committeeman?" He said, "I think you'd be a good one." Ah, what the hell? Somebody tells you that, you know. I said, "I'll give it a try." I ran. I don't even think I had any competition. Nor did he. And so we became a team and I got—it was nice in that I got to go to negotiations. Normally that wasn't done, but they said, "Well, he's a good note taker." And so, I could take notes, so I did. And they let me set through negotiations, you know, and eventually—it became a problem later on after we had settled and all that kind of stuff. It was probably six, eight months down the road, maybe even a

year. And the guy who had negotiated for management's side, there was some question about—whatever it was. And they went back to my notes. He even agreed. He said, "All right, let's go back and see. See if Bob's got anything on that." And I did. And it was in favor of us.

DC: You both agreed to those records.

BH: Yeah. And so I thought that was—that was kind of like a feather in my cap, too, so.

DC: It sounds like until Bomber asked you to do this, you really hadn't been involved in the union or . . .

BH: No, no. No no.

DC: No, OK.

BH: Just a nice place to work. Go to work every day, I thought, "Man, and they're paying me, too," you know?

DC: How was your pay at the warehouse compared to Willow Run?

BH: You know, I had to take a cut in pay and I think that I was making a little over $3.00 an hour at Willow Run. I took a cut in pay and it was less than $3.00. I remember that. It was like $2.94, I think, is what it was. And . . .

DC: Well how was it without the commute?

BH: Oh it was great. But also what I lost is I'd built up six years of seniority. I lost that seniority—plant seniority. I still had service time—six years of service, but I had to start over on my vacation pay. And I was up to probably two weeks vacation pay, or you know, somewhere in that neighborhood. So I had to start all over from scratch again.

DC: So vacation pay is plantwide then?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, you lose it if you—when you lose seniority. You got to have seniority to have vacation pay.

DC: Plant seniority, yeah OK.

BH: Yup. And so I lost that. Had to start all over again. I didn't like that, you know, but I was eight miles from here over there, as opposed to the thirty-five to fifty, depending on which way I went down there. So it was worth it. And it was just—it was easier work. I mean, I looked *forward*—I looked forward to going in to work every day. It was really—it was really nice.

DC: Now what made you look forward to going in to work?

BH: Oh, I think the people, the type of work. There was really no real pressure from management. You know, you did your job and it was just—everybody knew everybody. You know, they welcomed you aboard and it was really, it was really a family-type thing. In fact, they used to—people—they'd ask people if you had friends or relatives that need a job and if so, you know, do you recommend them?

DC: And that would be management personnel asking you this?

BH: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. They'd want to know that, you know, and if you got somebody and they were hired, because they felt—I think it was a Buick philosophy—that hey, if you hire family or friends, you know, you get somebody that's a little bit more responsible. You know, and you're not going to necessarily say, "Oh yeah, he's a great person," have him come in there and they don't do well, you know. You know, so I thought it was a smart—GM doesn't do that, that I know of, today. But I think that was a very smart policy to have done that. You know, you just got good people. I wouldn't recommend—I had an uncle that asked me if I could get him in there, and I knew he was an alcoholic. I said, "No, they're not hiring." It wasn't but a few days later this guy, his wife wanted to get in, and I said, "Yeah, I'll recommend her." Went up there, and she got hired in. So I mean, you know it's—and that's the kind of way I think people looked at that job. You know, that was our place. And we didn't want it messed up. That was a good place to work.

DC: Did you have many women working there?

BH: We didn't have any women working there until about 1968. And—it may have been as early as '67, but I think it was '68. And not only—that's when women started working there but that's also when we lost Buick. And we had a division called GMPD, GM Parts Division, I think.

DC: Oh, so you're working for the whole . . .

BH: Yeah. And that's when, that's when if there was prob—that was a time in my career that I wished that I wasn't a committeeman. Because we had whole new management come in there. In fact, our plant manager was relegated to a clerk.

DC: Oh really?

BH: He was. Yup.

DC: The plant manager?

BH: The plant manager. But he was a Buick guy and these other people that came in were all Chevy people. And we swear to this day that they took the lousiest people they had in Chevy and put them in GMPD. We—I mean, they came in there and everything just turned around. I mean, you were timed, you were watched continually. Even the supervisors that were the old Buick supervisors had to do that, or they lost their job. We

had a supervisor—we had some supervisors, if they had been hourly employees before—they came back to be all labor guys. They didn't want any part of it. They used to take—for example if you were part of Buick management, on their paydays they'd go out and they'd pay all of their Chevy people first and then just before everybody went home, the salaried people that were old Buick, just before they went home, they got their paycheck. I mean, it was just the way that they were. And we weren't used to that. I mean, it was like taking a step, a giant step way back in time, you know? And they were doing it to their management people. And they had a job—we had some jobs in there that were somewhat production in nature in that we boxed up sheet metal, you know, and it was part of the unitizing. They—I remember one area in sheet metal, they had three supervisors watching that line that probably wasn't more than sixty feet long. And those supervisors, I'd catch them—they'd be hiding in the racks, you know, behind parts and watching out there. And if they saw somebody that wasn't doing the job, they were put on notice. It led to some fights. I know one supervisor who was an old Buick supervisor, and when I'd hired in he had a hunting accident and he was blind in one eye—an arrow hit him in the eye and, you know, blinded him. And I remember we hired some guys that were kind of like temporary, especially college students. We used to get those, you know. They were OK. It was kind of a neat thing for GMPD to hire those type of guys. One guy came back from lunch and the supervisor was waiting for him and he had turned from a good guy into a bad guy through the pressure. And he told this guy he was late. This guy says, "I'm tired of you staring at me every day, or telling me this, watching me doing all this." And he hit him and he knocked him down and he kicked him and he beat the hell out of him. The guy lost his hearing, the supervisor did. Of course, he left, you know, he quit. Of course, yeah, he was gone anyways, but I mean—and that's some of the pressures that people were under. This management turned just, just a one-eighty from what Buick was. They were rotten. They were rotten, rotten people. The things they would do. And they did it to their own, you know, their own management people. We had one guy, one general supervisor, and he was going back to Buick. And he told me that we were having a tour and this, the head of GM PD, the top guy was going to come around. And they told him to stand outside his office and visibly shake when that guy came by. He wanted to see him shaking. That's how important this guy was supposed to be. And, you know, if not, then you suffered the consequences somehow, you know. They were just, they were rotten. They were bastards. There's no other—they were just bad.

DC: And how would they time you on these jobs? You said they timed you.

BH: Oh, they—all they would do is stand back and they would—you'd—one guy would put a piece of sheet metal on there and the next two guys, maybe, they'd put it in a box. And it was a regular production line. And what they would do is, is if this guy over here decided he was going to take a little bit of time before he put the next piece on, you're wasting time and they would write you up. [?] once the piece of sheet metal was on there—usually there were rollers. It wasn't—I think there was one end that was conveyor belt off the end. But there were rollers. If this guy—the next guy decided he wasn't going to push that thing along right away, you know, if he was going to take thirty seconds—and I'm not exaggerating when I say thirty seconds—if he was going to stand around for twenty seconds, they'd walk right out there and say, "You're on notice for wasting time." And

that's the way that GMPD management was.

DC: Now what did that do to your workload as a committeeman?

BH: Oh, it—of course it upped. I mean, we went out of sight. And it wasn't long. We struck—we struck that plant [pause] '69—'67, maybe, we struck that plant. I think it was '67. I think that's when they came in—it was '67. Boy, I can't remember. I can't remember for sure but it was somewhere around there. And we struck the plant. And we were out for—it started out nationally and we were out—God, we were out for a long time. Seventy, seventy-two days, seventy-three days, something like that, somewhere around there.

DC: Just the individual plant?

BH: It was also a national strike at the same time. Yeah. But we had—we just—we had some guys in there, the supervisors—that I do know this—that those guys, we picketed in the plant and they had to come in to work every day. And I do remember this one guy and—I'm not—I won't tell you his name, but he was a supervisor in our plant. And I remember one morning there was some, some pretty big guys from the union hall waiting for that car. Because we—when they came in, we would either stop the cars or let them through, you know. And then we had the power to stop those cars. We'd stand in the driveway. Well we knew what car he was riding in. And the picketers just—they stopped that car, and when these four guys emerged and started—that car was in reverse and out of there. Yeah. I think it was—during that time, just before we went out on strike, I had an appendicitis attack and my appendix out. So I was gone for a week, but I went—I think the day I got out of the hospital, they went on strike. So I was over on the picket line, you know.

DC: Oh, no kidding?

BH: But I was there. And I was—it was like—I think I went out on a Thursday or a Friday and I was—I came back probably on a Saturday or something like that. I just came right out of the hospital right out to the picket line. And, you know, I wanted to be a part of that. But I still—I was on sick leave for thirty or thirty-five days. So I didn't get to go in and negotiate. My alternate got to negotiate during that time. And then when I was off sick leave, well then I went back in and did the negotiation bit along with the others. And it was—it wasn't good. I know there were some shots fired over there at the plant. It was just lousy management. You know, and Pontiac Motor was, as bad as what they were, they were better than GMPD. These guys were just going to prove that they could run this place and snap everybody into shape. And we lost a lot of employees, you know, through quitting, through discharges, firings, things like that.

DC: So there's some you couldn't stop.

BH: We couldn't save. Yeah. Yeah. You know, and they'd build a case against you. You'd—you know, it was easy to build a case. I mean, hell, by the time you're defending on this one, they got three more backed up over here, you know, and you're just—it was hard.

And eventually, I think, they were smart enough to know that committeepeople after awhile, you know, they'd bargain—they'd bargain away some stuff, you know? OK, well, let me see, to clear him on this one, I'll let this one stay, you know. But this one over here was like a balance of two weeks, so let's give him the week and they'll erase that one. Well, yeah you do that and thirty days later, then they got him again, you know. And so, I mean they played a very good game. A game that was tough for us to keep up with.

DC: And it was very different, you said, from . . .

BH: Oh yeah. Yeah, you know they just—they wouldn't negotiate or anything. I mean it was just, it was lousy. It just was. Our cases then went up to higher levels. They went up beyond just our plant, you know. We usually had internationals—you know, the regional guy would come in and did a lot of—you got to know those guys pretty good. They were in there.

DC: So what did you feel like your options were at that point?

BH: I'd just continue to struggle against it, you know. I guess there was always an option not to run and eventually I exercised that option. But . . .

DC: Not to run for committeeman duty?

BH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And—but for the most part we negotiated. We, you know, we tried to do what we could to keep things going.

DC: Yeah. So you stayed at that job then.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, I stayed at that job until around 1972, I think. And then I opted not to run and I was probably—I was out of the—out of any of the bargaining part of it for, I don't know, three or four years. And then I got back in as a benefits rep.

DC: OK. And where was that?

BH: Pardon me?

DC: Benefits rep at the same place?

BH: Same place, yup, same place. Same place. What had happened is over the years they used to have—benefits reps were made up, and geez they had an insurance guy and then they had a guy that when you were laid off—SUB pay. And S and A or something like that. They have three of those guys. Well they were beginning to consolidate those, and as our numbers began to go down—at one time we were up over a thousand people. So we could have that many. And then they started to dwindle down. Well the chairman at that time asked me if I would take that job, because they were compiling three of them into one. And they said that one guy was going to retire—one of the guys was going to retire, and one guy he didn't like, and something else about the other guy. So he asked me and I said

to him, I said, "Well, there's one alternate there." I says, "He's on, isn't he?" He said, "Oh yeah." I says, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'll go talk to him and if he wants the job then, you know, I'm not going to." You know? So I went and talked to him, he said, "No, I don't want the job." He said, "I want to be the alternate." And he had been on the job, the alternate, for quite awhile. And I think he used to drink a little bit, so it, you know—so I ended up becoming the benefits rep. And it wasn't a full-time job. It was full-time if you had calls. And I was working on the rail dock at the time—I was a shipping checker. There was three of us that unloaded rail cars. And my job was to check the cars—help load, check the cars, and then seal the car at the end of the day.

DC: Is that when the orders were all filled and ready to ship?

BH: Yeah. And those were bigger orders, you know, I mean, there was the sheet metal and things like that. Those old racks again, you know—we'd put the sheet metal on it that were going to some other plant, you know? [laughs]

DC: So someone like you when you were twenty-one's going to haul it out.

BH: Yeah, right. So. But that was my job. And I—what I did was I began reading the national agreement, and it said that you had—you had time to answer all your calls and that you had, like, four hours a week to do your filing. And I didn't even have an office—it was part of the shop committee center. I had a filing cabinet or something in there. And I thought, "Well you know, this isn't right. I think I could do a good job." So I started looking at what benefits, you know, people had and things, and then I started reading the book. So then what I did, "Well hell!" So I started posting bulletin boards: "Does your wife know what happens if you're killed on the job? If you don't know, you better call me." And so I started doing that around the plant, different questions, you know, and pretty soon I started getting calls. Well I started getting calls to where my crew wouldn't—they wouldn't load the car, you know, because they had to have the shipping checker, you know, that classification take care of that stuff.

DC: Yeah, you weren't there.

BH: So this—you're right. And sometimes the cars didn't get sealed and they couldn't ship—take the car out, you know. So then they had to scramble around and that made the train late when it went out and all that. So it was a lot of things. So finally my supervisor told me—and he was a pretty good guy—he told me, he says, "You just report over there every morning. I don't want to see you out here anymore." So, that became a full-time job.

DC: Full-time, wow.

BH: Yeah. So, if you—sometimes you can play the game.

DC: So you P.R.'d your way into . . .

BH: That's right. That's right. That happened more than once at that location.

DC: You mean with you or with . . .

BH: Yeah, with me.

DC: Oh yeah? What was the other time?

BH: Oh there was another time where I became—this was later—I was on the benefits job probably for about six or seven years. And then we had what we called the Q.W.L, quality work life, process began. And the chairman, the new chairman, wanted me to take over that, also. And so did the—the company did, too. But they wanted me to do both jobs. And I said, "No, I can't do both." I says, "I'll do one or the other." And so the chairman went in, and he went and told the superintendent, "Hey, he does one or the other. He doesn't want to do them both, so where do you him?" And he said, "Well, let's put him on Q.W.L." And when he said that, I said, "Well, you know my alternate has to become full-time on the job then." So, my alternate got the full-time job. He became the benefits rep and I was the Q.W.L guy. Well they give me an office upstairs over the cafeteria. And over the years, and probably I was there probably from '83, '84, something like that; and eventually in '89 I left that and I got a real good job. But I was a—I remember this guy. The guy who was chairman that appointed me to the Q.W.L. thing, he became the health and safety guy and he also had an office up there. And there was—it was like two rooms up there that were, that were—ah, they weren't big enough to really hold a lot of people. Each one would hold maybe twenty people, you know. So we wanted it bigger. So one day there—there was a wall that separated those—so one day we just started taking the wall down. We just—you know, it was made out of plywood and two-by-fours, so we took it down, you know. Well we'd gone, talked to the guy, the maintenance supervisor and said, "Hey, you know, the plant manager wanted that to happen." You know, he wanted that to be a big room. So he—he said, "OK," you know. And we'd already taken it down by this time, you know?. And so when he come up there, he says, "Wow," he says, "it's all done," or just about. There was a conduit hanging down, electrical unit. And we said, "Yeah, you got to move that." And he said, "Well how's this happen?" We says, "Geez, must've been the night shift." "Oh yeah, they probably did it." So one day, there was a maintenance supervisor and the plant manager happened to be together in this area. And the plant manager said, "What the hell's happening here?" And the guy says, surprised, "Oh, I'm just doing what you wanted. You know, you wanted this bigger room and everything." He says, "We're just taking care of that." And he goes, "Oh. Oh, yeah." [laughs] So I mean, you do things, you did things—we found out that if you wanted something done, you did it yourself, you know, and you suffered the consequences. Usually there wasn't any consequences.

DC: Did that management ever lighten up at all?

BH: They lightened up after some of them left, but they were still there—they were still there probably until the mid-'80s, that whole group.

DC: That group that came in?

BH: Yeah. And that plant has never really gotten back to where it was. I mean, that was such a, such a good plant to work in. And you know, the same people—there was five general supervisors—one was a black general supervisor and he'd been an hourly employee. And they promoted him. And he wasn't part of the clique. But there were four general supervisors—there was a superintendent, and those guys were just, they were just bad news. Just bad news. They just—they did everything they could to create havoc. And just—it's just fathomless what they would do, you know, to create problems.

DC: It sounds like in their minds they were trying to whip you into shape.

BH: That's what they were trying to do. And as long as you did exactly—and, you know, it didn't make any difference what it was. They'd tell you to do something—if you didn't, it was disobeying a direct order. It may not have anything to do with work. But that's how they used the shop rules.

DC: What kinds of orders would they give that wouldn't have anything to do with work?

BH: Oh, you know, I really—I can't think of anything specific right now. They used to do things like, they would take people out of line of seniority, promote them. You know, they'd do that. "OK, tomorrow you're going to be the clerk." The clerk was a good job, you know. "Tomorrow you're going to be the clerk." Well, I'm not going to complain. But you had thirty other people out there that were complaining that had more seniority. So then all of a sudden you get out your pad, you know, and you start writing. I remember once I went through a whole grievance pad because, on one issue. One issue. And there was probably only eight people involved.

DC: What was the issue?

BH: You know—I can't remember what it was right now. I remember the area, but I don't remember the issue. It was some time ago. And . . .

DC: But you remember using up the whole pad.

BH: Oh yeah. I remember, that was the first—I think there was twenty-five grievances in a pad, and I went through them all. And sometimes you did that just to create paperwork. Because that supervisor then had to answer every one of them. It may be denied or something like that, but he had to answer it. And if he denied it then I made sure it went up to the next step so that somebody else—somebody else eventually had to do all the paperwork on it.

DC: So if they're going to be pissy with you, you're going to . . .

BH: That's right. I can do the same, you know, I can do that back. And it happened. We still had a lot of good times, but we generated most of those good times ourselves. I ended up on the rail dock again, you know, and stayed there for quite some time. And the rail dock

didn't have any women working out there. Most of those women were—you know, if you looked at an area they were mostly in the unitizing area where we boxed parts and back on that packing line. By then they weren't picker packers anymore. They were just packers. We had pickers, and then we had packers! [laughs] You didn't pick and pack, you know?

DC: What would Peter Piper do? [laughs]

BH: Yeah, right. Right. So, some of those classifications were strange.

DC: Yeah. What about blacks? Were there blacks working in there as well?

BH: Oh yeah, yeah. Yep. Yep. When I hired in there, there was two black guys that I recall and one Oriental guy. And the one black guy—his name was Henry Reed—he eventually retired from there. In fact, I think Henry—he went on salary. And I think he was on salary for a few years, and I think he came back hourly and retired. Pretty sure he did. And the other one was Biocci Uchi [sp?] I think was his name. And he eventually retired. He was an hourly guy, and went to Hawaii to live. Live in Hawaii. And his, you know, I don't know how—either one—I still hear about Henry Reed because he's in the area and I see his name every now and then.

DC: OK, so he's still around?

BH: Yep, he's still around. Yep. He does a lot of work, charitable type work, you know. That type of thing. And then eventually we did hire in—when we hired in women, we really began to hire in some black people then. And you know, it got to where it wasn't really—it wasn't really just white people that were hired in. Hispanics were hired in, black people. I don't—some Orientals, but not too many. I think there was—I eventually left Drayton Plains in '89.

DC: OK. You said you got a really good job then.

BH: Yeah, I became the UAW divisional coordinator for joint activities, which was really a good job. It was kind of . . .

DC: What is that?

BH: That was a job, it was—that involved mostly training. Anything that we were into jointly, that the UAW and General Motors were into jointly. Quality of Work Life was a part of that, health and safety was kind of like a part of that—all those aspects around that joint arena. And then my job was to coordinate that on the division level. And that was a very good job and one of the reasons it was a good job, it paid very well. You know, you got the—it was a pay that was negotiated on a very high level, quite a bit more money than what you made at the local level. In fact, I think when I left, when I retired, my pay was somewhere up around $35.00 an hour. Yeah, so it was a very good-paying job. And I worked at the central office at Swartz Creek, and I was the only UAW person there. All the other people were management people.

DC: Oh really?

BH: Yeah, all salaried. It was the front part of the warehouse, the Flint warehouse, but I wasn't connected to that part. There were hourly people back there, but where I was at I was the only one. All my bosses were in Detroit. There was no time card. There was—nobody kept track of my time.

DC: So the union was your boss at that point?

BH: Yes. Oh yeah. Definitely. Yep. So—and you know, I was out of it for the most part, the confrontational part of it. You know, I—this part, there was negotiating but it wasn't like being a committeeperson or anything like that. No.

DC: What did you think of the Quality of Work Life program?

BH: I really thought it was a great program. Still do. Still do. I think it was a really good program. I think that we had difficulty implementing it. Had it been implemented the way that it was first demonstrated to us, I think GM would've been years ahead of where they're at now when it comes to quality.

DC: Why is that though?

BH: Why is . . .

DC: Tell me about what you think should have been done.

BH: Oh, let me—I guess probably it started out as the Q.W.L. process. And the Q.W.L. process, they spent a lot of money training people but never—but never gave them the authority to do the job. Some divisions or some plants within some divisions did and you heard good things about it. But the management there was what made the difference. Because they allowed you to do the job as was—and that was the Q.W.L. process. Then when we got into quality network, the first thing they did is they took groups of people, all your top people from the management side and from the local union side, took them to Florida for a week. Each division did that. In fact, I spent—I must've spent three months down there training, you know, going through a process to explain processes to people. And—big kickoff. Cost millions and millions of dollars. It had to. I mean, it was lavish. You know, at least you weren't broke then, you know, so it was a very lavish thing. And it wasn't long after that, then that's when I went on board. That process—if you look at some of the things, if you look at the material, the outlines, and to follow those things—God they were so easy to implement within the warehouse. You know, I mean Just in Time and some of that stuff, you know. I don't remember it all. Plant maintenance, and that kind of stuff. All you had to do was implement that. And when you begin to turn people loose to do that, it was like in the old days. You know, we were into the—like a process like that many, many years ago. But it was like that. You know, people would enjoy then again coming in to work. Because they had some control over their destiny at

work. I thought it was a great—I still think it's a great thing, you know. I—I'm not in total agreement with where they're at now, you know, that whole process, you know. And, you know, kind of like Taj Mahal in Detroit now, you know, and that. But I understand, too, at the same time, if that works, then it's worth it. I just don't know that it's utilized to its fullest. I mean, I was down there—I did a little tour down there this year and saw what was the ability, what was capable of being done. But I don't think it is.

DC: Yeah. So it's interesting because you said that if the program were implemented properly, it would be almost like the warehouse was when you first moved there.

BH: Yeah. It's interesting, yeah. But I—that's how I saw back then, you know. You know, you were trained on your job, you knew what your job was, and you were given the freedom to do your job. I can remember that plant manager—we used to—we'd get done with our stuff, you know, and we used to sit around and play Yahtzee, you know. And I can remember that plant manager coming out of his office and he would walk right past the packing line to get where he was going. And he'd see us—he'd start looking up. You know, he never saw us play Yahtzee.

DC: Because he knew the work was done.

BH: He knew it. He knew it. He trusted that, you know. And we never gave him reason not to. [Mr. Houck got a leg cramp] So, but we used—we played ball at lunch hour. And we'd take a little, one of those little plastic wiffle balls and we'd wrap it with nylon tape. And we'd take plastic bags, stuff a broom handle in it, tape it back up, and we played our version of baseball. Never run bases. And you'd just hit the ball in certain areas and that counted as a single or whatever. And we even had one time where we had the playoffs—we had an all-star game. We had some of—no women there, so the guys dressed up like cheerleaders, you know—they made little skirts. We did things at Christmastime—at Christmastime—this is no lie—I—we had these big—ah I forget what we called them—but the flatbed wagons, like, you know? And we used to put stock on them. We got a—we got a guy to hook up a, his—jitney, I guess was it. Yeah. Hooked that up, and at Christmastime I led a group in singing Christmas carols. We went around the plant—not that he didn't know—but we even went into the plant manager's office and sang Christmas carols to the guy, you know. And that was great, you know. We were kind of like a family then. Our work was done. You know, we took care of our job, then we did that kind of stuff. We also had—we had one packing line—there was two packing lines—we had competition at Christmastime and you had to use parts within the plant to decorate a Christmas tree or something. And this group over here, man, they took it—they took a battery out of one of the trucks and they found—they wired—took wiring harnesses, put lights, you know. I mean, they just did a great job. They beat the hell out of us, you know. [laughs] I mean, there, we just . . .

End of Tape II, Side A

Begin Tape II, Side B

BH: . . . we were just—I was talking about the Christmas stuff. We just had a good time. It was fun. It changed. It changed when that new management came in. And they just—hell, they'd go in the johns, they'd time you, make you ask permission to go to the bathroom. I mean, they were just all—and we weren't used to that, you know, it just—it was barbaric, and you know, in our—it was just bad. It really was. We had general supervisors there that, they took it out on you, personal stuff, you know. I mean, I remember one guy, he was single, and he kind of—one of the ladies that worked for a vending machine company, he kind of liked her. So this general supervisor—this guy's married, you know—so he used to, any time he'd see him talking to her, he'd burn him. Write him up for wasting time. And you know, it was just because of that, you know. They did things like that.

DC: Well, switching gears a little bit, before you cramp up again [both laugh], what about your own family in that period? You know, your kids—what did you do as a family and all?

BH: Of course, we did something different—we did take vacations.

DC: You did, you say?

BH: Yeah, we did.

DC: Where did you go?

BH: Oh, we camped, mostly. We had a little tent and we did a lot of camping like that.

DC: Where would you go?

BH: I think the first time we would've went into the Upper Peninsula. And I think that was around 1968 or '69. What I was doing is I tore down—I tore down the cottage that we had here. We tore that down in the early part of '69—just tore it down. And then my wife moved in with her parents and I moved in with my parents. And then we built a house. And then the Christmas of, December of '69, we moved back in here. It wasn't finished. I mean, we didn't have bricks on the outside, the back bedroom didn't even have windows in it, yet.

DC: It'd be a little chilly.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, in fact, snow would blow in there, you know. And nothing would be—pigtail for lights, you know, and things like that. But the bathroom was in and we did have a wall around it. Downstairs there was just two-by-fours, you know. I didn't use any steel beams or any steel so I partitioned the basement off on it before I poured the cement floor. But we did a lot of that, we—my kids were involved—my son was involved, at least, in Little League for awhile. Good ball player. And did a little bit of that. Then as we became—got a little bit more money, we purchased that tent, and I think we went from sleeping on the

ground to buying cots. And we had a little pop-up tent, the four of us in that little thing, not much bigger around than this table here. And then we got a bigger tent and we camped in that for quite awhile and then we eventually got a pop-up trailer. And we camped for quite awhile. Did a lot of things with the kids in school, you know. Whatever they were involved with.

DC: What schools?

BH: They were in the Walled Lake school system. Yeah, and we were involved. You know, in everything they did.

DC: What was your wife doing during those years?

BH: She was the homemaker. Yep. I—she could have worked, but I, you know, it was never something that we said you had to do. We were never to the point where she had to get a job. She did, I mean, she took—she worked for old Wrigley's, I think, for awhile. Went down here to work at a plastic factory. I think she went in one night and never went back, you know. But we always—we always—I always tried to manage money enough, and so did she, to where she didn't have to work. We thought it was important that, you know, she raise the kids or be with them. You know, because I couldn't be. So. I probably could've got her a job over at Drayton Plains. Because they would, you know, they would hire spouses. So, but we just—I thought it was more important that she stayed home. So did she.

DC: Well how did you get by financially in those years?

BH: Not bad. We didn't have a big savings account or anything like that. We didn't have much money in the bank because we were still—see, what I didn't do, I borrowed five thousand dollars to build this house. And we had about a thousand dollars. And so we did all the work ourselves, we didn't— the only thing I didn't do, I had a cousin that was a plumber and he said, "I'll give you a good deal on plumbing." So he did. And—but I didn't finish this house—I'll bet you it took me eight years to get it to where it looks like it is now. Maybe ten years. And still some of it isn't done, you know? [laughs] But it took awhile. And so—and we did that—you know, as we saved a little bit of money, then we put it in the house. We didn't have brand new cars all the time, you know. In fact, it wasn't really until—we didn't have much in the way of savings until, I think when it was negotiated that you could—they had like a savings plan at General Motors, and that's when I began to save a little bit of money. And I always said that—I had thirty years in in 1989, and I said, "There's two things I need: I need thirty years and I need twenty-five hundred dollars in my savings program." Well I had the thirty years but I didn't even have twenty-five hundred dollars at that—or twenty-five thousand, not twenty-five hundred. Twenty-five thousand. And so that's when the other job came in. And then I was able to put, I think, the first few years I could put the maximum in, which was nine, nine thousand, somewhere in that—eighty-eight hundred. Something like that. And I was there for ten years. So in that whole ten years I saved—put away a little money.

DC: You kids would've been out of the house by then?

BH: Yeah, my kids were gone by that time, yeah. Yeah.

DC: So what did they end up doing?

BH: My son—they both went on to college. My son lasted a year, maybe two years. My daughter graduated. She graduated from Oakland University. My son went up to Michigan Tech. Spent one semester up there, came back down, went to OCC [Oakland Community College]. Very good in computers—just a whiz. Just a very, very intelligent person. I don't tell him that too often, but he is very intelligent. But it bored him. You know, the only thing that didn't bore him was the computer end of it. He was running the computer library up here at the college. He was in one of the computer—supposedly computer classes. His teacher told him she didn't want to see him in the classroom. Show up for the tests. He's got a memory like—so he'd come home. Said, "What, do you got? A test tomorrow?" "Yep, and I'm studying." He'd go through the book the night before, and go up there, pass the test. But he just—he's kind of a laid-back person, you know. And he works for Ameritech now. My daughter works for—she works for one of the Manpower franchises in Detroit—or no, I guess it isn't Detroit now. Farmington Hills. And she's been with them for quite awhile. And she's married, has two children. My son is married and he's got three children. Yep, they're doing well. His wife is a school teacher in the Chippewa Valley, or something, way over by Utica.

DC: Way over by Mt. Clemens.

BH: Yes, yes, yeah. Way over there. And they live over here. So she's got a long drive. And my son-in-law, my wife's husband, he works for Lear Corporation now. He's an engineer with them. They met in college—they met before that. They met through church, I guess—they went together for awhile. Then she dumped him and then they got back together. So. And they're a very nice couple. He's a very nice guy. He really is. And my daughter-in-law's the same. She's a very nice person. So we've been lucky. Five good grandkids, you know. Very good. Yeah, they're good.

DC: Well can you think of questions that I should have asked you that I haven't asked you?

BH: You know, I think you covered a lot of it. I think probably as I sit here and think, I could probably do another couple hours on some of the more intricate things that went on, you know—as I sit and think I remember this and remember that. But you know, it isn't always pertinent to it, you know.

DC: Well, it may become so. It sounds like if we were to schedule another time in the future we could probably [?].

BH: Sure. Sure. Yeah, I know we've gone through pretty much my whole career at GM. For the most part it was good times. There were times when—and the reason I elected not to run that one time is because the management was so miserable. I mean, they got to me.

And I wasn't the only one. There was a group of us that were on the shop committee there. And we all eventually got—with the exception of one person—all eventually got back into it. One of the guys now is an international rep with the UAW. The one guy that was chairman when I was there, he's now the health and safety rep—still at Drayton Plains. The other guy who became my alternate stayed as benefits rep that whole time and he eventually retired. And there was one other guy that we had on the shop committee at that time and when he elected not to run, he was a skilled tradesman and he stayed there. He didn't pursue it any farther, so. And he's—he since retired.

DC: They battered you but they didn't break you.

BH: Yeah. Right, right. And you know, it wasn't easy. You know, and I really felt for the people, and there was only so much you could do. You know, you did what you could, you know. We won more than we lost, I know that. Because we—yeah we fought hard, too.

DC: Yeah. Well it sounds like you fought ingeniously.

BH: I had them—at one time, the group of people, I had them do a wildcat strike.

DC: Tell me about that.

BH: Yeah. Yeah. There was some issue, it was in that same area where they were, where I wrote all those grievances. It was in that area. And all we had was that by that time we'd consolidated and we'd brought people down from Flint. And some of those people were, in Flint, more political than what we ever were in Drayton. We were just, you know, we were Podunk there, you know, so we didn't do politics. And so some of those people that came down knew the best way to get in somewhere was to—they created problems for the hourly people—not with management but with the hourly people. And then when they did that, of course, then management would jump in and those people over there would get—so, we had called a union meeting one night. And part of what people did was they'd get off at different times. Well, if you got—with the union, you had to schedule the union meeting late enough to where everybody could make the meeting, you know, at least on a shift. And so some people would, of course, they'd start their union meeting down at the beer hall—at the bar down there. So by the time they got there, they were in pretty good shape, so. And they agitated me enough to where finally—and I was the alternate then. I wasn't the committeeman—and Bomber, I don't know where Bomber was at, but he wasn't there that evening. So I conducted the meeting. And they were just going through all kinds of crap. Management did this, management did that, and we're going to walk out, we're going to walk out." And I said, "Well, if you do, you do, you know?" And they says, "Well what are you going to do?" I said, "Well I have to defend you." They said, "Are you authorizing?" I said, "Well look, if things are that bad, yeah." So the next day they sat down. They didn't walk out, but they sat down. And this guy from Flint, that Buick guy—we hadn't completely transferred over, but we were in that process—him and Bob Merito came down and they said, "Bob, we hear, one of the guys said that you authorized this." I said, "Well, I said I'd . . ." you know, I knew—I was smart enough then to think, "God, you can't authorize a strike," you know? Hell, you'll be out, you know?

And I said, "What I *told* them was, is that I'd defend them." "Well, you sure?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." And so Bomber knew. He knew, you know, he knew what had happened. He said, "Well Bob. Here's what you got to do." Because he was trying to save my butt at the same time. He says, "You got to get them all to go back to work now." So, they were all sitting in the cafeteria, and I went up to the cafeteria, we had a little meeting and I told them, "Hey, we're working on everything," you know. And I told them—I don't know—I don't think that they—not all of them wanted to participate in this. Some of them were there just because these other politicians were there. So I talked to them and they said, "Well, let's go back to work." And when the majority of them went, then everybody—those two guys weren't going to stand there. There were about two guys. They weren't going to stand there by themselves, you know. So it blew over. And I didn't get fired. I should've, probably, you know. According to the rules, I probably would've.

DC: Yeah, words passed your lips. But did management relent at all any of their immediate grievances?

BH: Yeah, you know, what it was is that, again, in that process we were moving from Buick to GMPD. And it was easy for Buick to get off—not that Buick was hard to deal with, you know. But yeah, they listened to them and they were just, they weren't major issues. We made them major issues or some people made them major issues. And they pretty much dealt with them, you know. But when they, the other management took over, it was back the same way. It's just that I was wiser. One of the guys who had been a committeeman up at Plant 18 in Flint, he was one of the real rabble rousers and caused that. He eventually became a general supervisor.

DC: He did?

BH: Yeah.

DC: Whoa, what do you think about that?

BH: I didn't like him. Didn't like him as an hourly person. I liked him even less as a salaried employee. And he eventually got into trouble. He was stealing while he was on salary, and it became so obvious that he got in trouble over that. They didn't fire him, but they—he got relegated to some other area, you know, job. I knew he was that way. When we'd visited up there at the Plant 18, the committeepeople got to park their cars inside the gate. And he had told us that he had put an engine in his trunk and drove out with it one night. I thought, "Well, we don't do that at Drayton."

DC: Tachometer, maybe, but . . .

BH: Yeah, yeah. And you know, that didn't happen often. And back then they had an outlet store—it was in Flint. You could buy parts. You know, some of those parts, and they were cheap. You know, I mean they were, like, end of the model runs or something like that. But then they quit that when those—I think they had a lawsuit come back. Yeah. Somehow damaged the car, whatever. So they said, OK, no more outlets. But I think—I

can't really think of anything that you could have asked that, you know.

DC: Well I realize this is hard to scrunch someone's life into a couple hours. I'm sure more things will come to you. We can talk again some time.

BH: Yeah, if you'd like. You know, I'm open to that.

DC: It may be a little while.

BH: I think you get the real gist of what it was. I think I'm pretty forthright in, you know, in telling . . .

DC: I appreciate your candor, yeah.

BH: Because there were times it was miserable in there. It just was. But there were times it was great. You know? And we really took a step backwards. And it was like we progressed even from that point up until about when Fiero plant shut down. I remember those people, some of them got hired in to our plant. And they come over there and they go, "Oh my God. You guys are in the dark ages." You know, compared to them over there. Because they were in that process. They were in that whole team building or team work process, that quality process, much like we were in way back when. And they just couldn't believe it. We were so antiquated over there. You know? They wanted to *do* things. They said, "Is that all the supervisors got to do is stand around and watch you?"

DC: Yeah, this is the first time I've heard from someone in this kind of warehouse job and it's really interesting to me to learn about these different aspects of the industry.

BH: Yeah. And warehousing, you know—we had, when I hired in, I think we had forty-five warehouses. And then we eventually got down to about twenty. And I think now they're back up to twenty-four. When I hired in, they had a lot of small warehouses throughout the United States. Everywhere, you know, just all over the place. Then they thought, "Well wait a minute. We should be making just *big* warehouses, you know, and few of them." So they got down to about twenty. They had what they called a parts warehouse, which Drayton Plains is—Pontiac, Flint, Lansing, and Martinsburg, West Virginia. And what we did then was we shipped primarily to the other, what we call parts distribution centers, PDCs. And then from there, they went out to the dealers and the jobbers and the things like that. Each warehouse also has their will call, where dealers could, you know, buy parts, and employees, too. But that was how that was made, so what they were doing was trying to build up these parts plants and make fewer and a little bit larger PDCs. Well, in around 1993, '94, somewhere around there, they hired a consulting company to come in and try to analyze their whole business, help them through that. What come out of it is the consulting group says, "We think you ought to have smaller and more warehouses." So they're getting back to that. They are, they're—now there's more ware—less employees. We started out, I think, with about 14,000 employees, hourly employees. We're probably down to around between eight and nine thousand.

DC: Throughout the whole warehouse system?

BH: Mm-hm. Yup. They've eliminated a lot of jobs. Of course, you know, and that's going to come with, you know, breakthroughs in the way you do things. And even the quality network process—it tends to free up employees. It tends to because, you know, it just—you're cutting out a lot of the red tape that normally, you know, you do. Have you ever got to go down to—have you been in any of the plants?

DC: No, I haven't.

BH: Oh, OK. OK, OK. One of the best ones that I've found over the years was Saturn. Saturn had a great workforce. And I don't know that it's still that way. I think it's kind of reverted a little bit. But, oh, they had things like—they would take people off the line and set up a mock line and have them do their job and say, "OK, now how can you do it better?" You know, I mean they were that kind of a company when they started out. I think there's been some problems both with the UAW and with management and that whole thing, you know, certain jealousies or whatever around that whole thing. Like they've lost control or something, even though they're building a great product, you know, quality-wise and price-wise and everything. But there's some jealousies and some egos that—but a great place. I've been down there about three or four different times and got to study and see what was going on down there. Yeah. They did a lot of team building stuff before you even went to the line. You had to go through, I think probably it was either three or five days training out on a course. And you did that with other employees. Employees hired you. You got interviewed and then they decided whether or not they wanted you.

DC: Really?

BH: Yeah, it was pretty cool. Their system of discipline, for example, for missing time—that went to the group. And the group didn't do anything to you, other than to say, "Hey look, we want you here on the job. You know, when we interviewed you we talked about this kind of thing, and you're kind of letting us down, you know? And that isn't helping the overall picture here. So how about straightening up?" If they don't, then it's turned over to the UAW person—and he's kind of like a committeeman, but a little bit more glorified—and the—that manager of that particular area. And so they sit down with the person and if, you know, if it's gone through the right process they'll say, "OK, here's what we're going to do. We're going to give you three days off with pay. And what we want you to do is think about your job and whether or not it's important. And then you come back here at the end of that three days and if you can do some of the things that we're going to outline for you and agree to that, then you get your job back. And if you don't, well then just move on." And it's kind of an adult way of dealing with that, you know. Some people come back and do it, some people move on. But they make you at that point do some things—whatever the violation you did, you have to sign something that you know this is a behavior, because you don't get a—the next chance is gone. You know, and it's real—I thought that was pretty fair, myself. You—because you make that decision then. But Saturn was a good place. There were some plants I remember—Bay City was a good plant. I think that

was a manufacturing plant, kind of like parts manufacturing, or something like that. That was a good plant for awhile.

DC: Did you tour these when you were benefits representative?

BH: No. No, I toured all those once I got the job, the joint activities rep. And then I toured all the warehouses, all of our warehouses. In fact, in the new ones, this person that was in personnel—kind of my counterpart—him and I designed the training for those new warehouses and began the process of training people to do the training, you know. And we had a—we had a group set up that went in to those new locations and the employees that came there to fill those spots—I had to go through, geez, at least a week of training—we may have had more than a week—to learn new scanning guns and how to put away the stock there and do different things. They had a weeklong indoctrination. And we did that. And it was a great job. A lot of travel, you know. So I enjoyed it.

DC: Yeah, you'd get to see a lot.

BH: I retired after forty years and missed it. And could still do the job. You know, and to me it would still be exciting.

DC: So you just retired a few years ago then?

BH: In '99. October of '99. Yeah, I've been out two and a half years.

DC: Wow, that was not long at all.

BH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah I could still do it. I'd like to, in fact. But my counterpart, he eventually retired and we still get together. In fact, I'll be seeing him this afternoon.

DC: Oh really?

BH: Yeah, because I have to start practicing the piano and he's the guitar player. So we get together and jam a little.

DC: Is your band going here?

BH: Yeah. I'm not too good. I've only been taking lessons for—I'm on my—I took four lessons in February and now I'm, I think I've just taken three more, so. Yeah, it's coming.

DC: Gotta give it time.

BH: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Well I really appreciate you spending time with me. I do, yeah.

BH: Yeah, OK.

End of Interview